

The Ryedale Historian

Number 29

2018–2019



Helmsley Archaeological and Historical Society

The Ryedale Historian is the biennial journal of the Helmsley Archaeological and Historical Society and has been publishing the results of archaeological investigations and historical research in the Ryedale area since 1965.

The Society was founded in 1950, originally as the Helmsley and Area Group of the Yorkshire Archaeological Society, for the purpose of archaeological and historical research on Ryedale and the dissemination of that research through lectures and discussion and later through publication in *The Ryedale Historian*.

The Society is a registered charity (No. 1089682) with a current membership of over one hundred. From September to April it provides a programme of illustrated lectures held at the North York Moors National Park Authority headquarters in Helmsley. During the summer months, it holds a series of visits to sites and locations of interest to its members.

For information on how to join the Society and its current programme of lectures and visits, please visit its website at www.helmsleyarchaeologicalandhistoricalsociety.org.uk.

Front cover image A tenancy agreement between John, Abbot of Byland Abbey, and William Storer, 2 April 1534, for Old Byland (see page 45)

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This issue first published 2020 by the Helmsley Archaeological and Historical Society
www.helmsleyarchaeologicalandhistoricalsociety.org.uk

ISSN: 1362-5365

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The Editor, Rowena Godfrey, theyedalehistorian@gmail.com

Editorial

Rowena Godfrey

This issue of *The Ryedale Historian* starts with Geoffrey Snowdon and Elizabeth Sanderson's concluding article about the Yearsley mill excavation, to follow on from their interim report published in Number 27. They discuss the finds as well as the history of the mill from its construction to its demolition and burial.

David Brewer writes about the higher status of women before the Georgian era and their subjugation after that time, citing local examples.

Recording the condition of the wall of the medieval deer park at Fyling was a project undertaken by Ed Dennison. He discusses the development of the park from medieval times onwards, then gives the results of his archaeological survey and comments on the significance of the crosses contained within the wall.

For many years Margaret Allison has been fascinated by the subject of the serpent and how its significance has changed through the ages. In her article she describes how the serpent or dragon is found both in the Anglo-Scandinavian stone sculpture in the Ryedale area and in local legends and folklore.

A tenancy agreement of 1534 concerning lands in Old Byland came to light recently and is now held in the English Heritage Trust collections. Susan Harrison describes the indenture and its significance in the troubled times of the dissolution of the monasteries. She then reviews the evidence for the location of Old Byland Grange.

These five articles are followed by three book reviews.

I am very grateful to all the contributors for their articles and reviews; to Jennifer Harris, Chair of the Helmsley Archaeological and Historical Society, for her help and support during the editing of this issue of the journal; Paul Harris for his helpful hints on its design and presentation; and Farrell Burnett, previous Editor of *The Ryedale Historian*, not only for her advice about editing this issue of the journal, but also for offering to become book review editor, in which role she arranged for two books to be reviewed, and reviewed one herself. Many thanks to you all.

We hope to produce Number 30 in the autumn of 2021. If you would like to submit an article for consideration, please contact me by email at theryedalehistorian@gmail.com: the deadline for submission will be the end of June 2021.

Unearthing the Yearsley water corn mill

Geoffrey Snowdon and Elizabeth M. Sanderson

Introduction

The removal of the extant remains of the Yearsley mill waterwheel by wood conservation specialists from York Archaeological Trust marked the final chapter in the work of the Yearsley Mill Research Project (YMRP); the remains are still undergoing a lengthy preservation process, but it is hoped that photos of the reconstructed waterwheel can be published in due course. The project has seen a small but dedicated community team of diggers and researchers carry this venture through to its successful conclusion.

The previously undisturbed and unrecorded mill site was discovered as far back as 2011 in an area of mixed woodland called 'The Wilderness', located between Gilling Park and Yearsley Moor SE5888 7603. The early stages of the dig were recorded in an interim report for *The Ryedale Historian* Number 27 2014-2015, pp. 6-17. This article will therefore concentrate on the results of the excavations, on some of the artefacts recovered, and on the way in which they have been analysed and interpreted to provide a narrative for the life of the mill.

The finds



Figure 1 The complete millstone

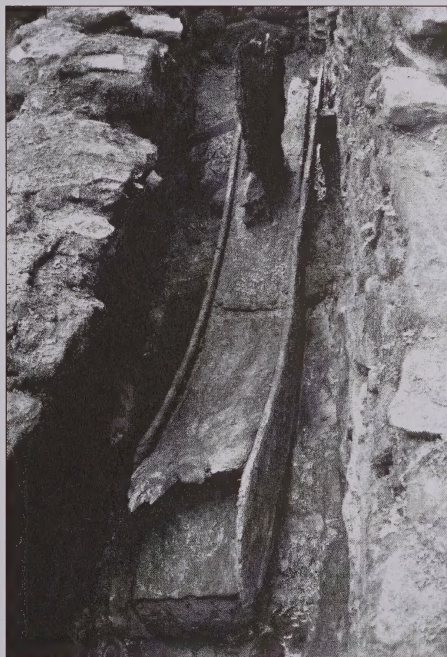


Figure 2 The remains of the waterwheel within the wheel-pit

The complete millstone and the remains of the waterwheel (Figures 1 and 2) were clearly the most important diagnostic features recovered from the excavations as they readily identified

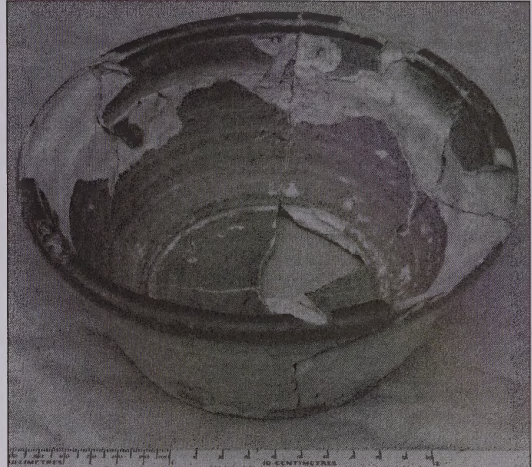
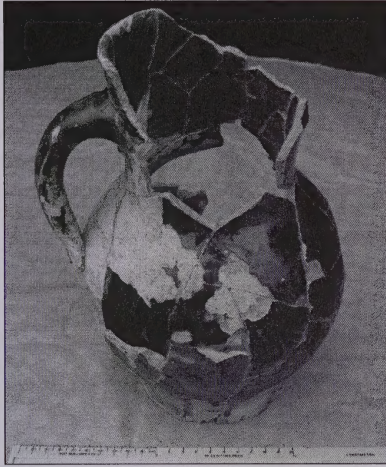
the site as a water corn mill. The wheel was of particular significance as its considered seventeenth-century date and overshot design make it the only one of its type in the north of England. It is hoped that it can be displayed, along with other finds and information about the site, at the Forestry Commission's Visitor Centre in Dalby Forest, North Yorkshire.

Other noteworthy mill related finds include four leaf-shaped pick blades (Figure 3) used for dressing the millstones, possible timbers from the hurst, or wooden frame, used to support the millstones, wedges, broken stone spindle bearings and millstone fragments. The latter were of differing sizes and materials and some were dressed to rotate in different directions, indicating the many modifications that had been made to the mill over its several hundred years of use.



Figure 3 Pick blades for dressing the millstones; they would have been mounted in wooden handles

In excess of 6,600 sherds of pottery were recovered from the site and a full assessment of the assemblage has been made by Anne Jenner and her team at York Archaeological Trust.¹ The earliest pieces dated to the twelfth century and the latest to the early eighteenth century. The analysis of the pottery not only helped to date the site but also provided an insight into the people who lived there and even the people who made the pots. The most common forms were jars, jugs (Figure 4) and bowls (Figure 5), locally made for domestic use. Brandsby wares made up the majority of the medieval types whereas Ryedale wares predominated in the seventeenth to eighteenth century period, possibly made by John Wedgwood and his family who were known to have made pottery in Yearsley around this time.



Figures 4 and 5 A jug and a bowl found at the site

A great variety of other finds was also uncovered and it was these that helped to bring the site to life and to forge the all-important link with the past. They included more intimate items such as a child's whirligig toy, brass pins, a pewter tankard, spoons (Figure 6), clay pipes, a knife, leather shoe parts, window and bottle glass, door keys (Figure 7) and even musket and pistol balls, at least one of which had been discharged. Was this the result of forced eviction, interpersonal violence or simply target practice? We may never know.



Figure 6 Two spoons probably dating from the seventeenth century. The one on the right is known as a 'rat-tail spoon'



Figure 7 A key, found near a rusted block of metal – possibly the lock

Discussion and conclusions

Despite an intensive and wide-ranging study of the documentary records by a dedicated research team, information relating to the Yearsley water mill has proved elusive, sketchy and very thin on the ground. In order to build up a picture of the mill and its social and economic importance to the area during the medieval and post-medieval periods, it has been essential to draw upon the archaeological evidence uncovered by the excavations on the site. By combining an interpretation of the finds and features with the limited documentary material, it has been possible to produce a tantalising story of the mill over the several hundreds of years of its existence.

It appears that the water mill was built around the late twelfth to early thirteenth century and eventually demolished and buried in the early to mid eighteenth century. During this period the site has undoubtedly undergone many changes but, for the purpose of this report, these changes or transitions will be considered under four phase headings:

- 1 The construction of the mill
- 2 The working life of the mill
- 3 The demise of the mill
- 4 The demolition and subsequent burial of the mill

1 The construction of the mill

Following the Conquest of 1066, the Norman aristocracy gradually established themselves throughout the English countryside, and one means of exploiting their power and control over the local population was to build a water mill.² The de Colville family held the land in Yearsley during the late twelfth and early thirteenth century and it seems likely that they, or their advisors, identified the stream in Elder Slack as a suitable source of water to drive a mill wheel.

The technology to construct and operate a water corn mill had existed in Britain since the Roman period and continued through the Saxon period; in the region of six thousand mills were recorded in the Domesday survey of 1086. However the number of watermills appears to have risen rapidly in the two centuries following the Conquest, due partly to the rising demand for flour from the increasing population but also to the realisation on the part of the landowners that, following the initial cost of their construction, corn mills provided a regular source of income at a relatively low running cost. They also provided a means of exerting the lord's feudal power over his tenants as he could compel them to use his manorial mill. This had the effect of converting the grinding of grain from a largely domestic, labour intensive industry – 'the daily grind' – into a more efficient, mechanised process, although many hand querns were destroyed in the process. As a further consequence, a great deal of labour was freed for work elsewhere on the manorial or monastic estates.³

The Yearsley watermill appears to have been one of many built around this late twelfth to early thirteenth century period. Unfortunately the substantial timbers retrieved from what were considered to be the earlier contexts [63] and [91] (see Figure 8) failed to provide more accurate dendrochronological dates for the construction process, there were insufficient rings (> 100) which would have been necessary to compare with other tree ring data sets in the region.⁴ The pottery recovered from these and other early contexts [99] and [93] did, however, confirm this late twelfth to early thirteenth century date.⁵ A sherd of York glazed ware from

the well-sealed fill of a rock-cut post-hole and a similar sherd from the primary cleaning layer on the north side of the cog pit are also good indicators of this early construction period.

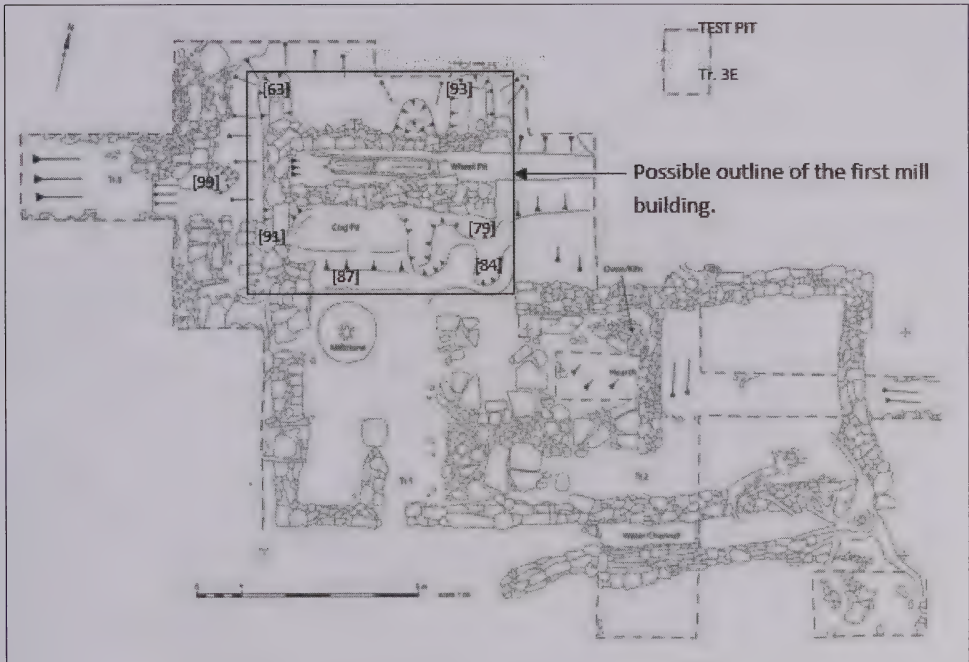


Figure 8 The plan of the mill site, showing the possible position of the first mill building

Once the appropriate site for the mill had been identified it appears that the original building process involved the removal of the overlying topsoil and subsoil to expose the sandstone bedrock. Trenches were then cut into this bedrock to form the wheel-pit, the tail-race and the cog pit. Four rock-cut post holes [93], [63], [91] and [79] were also chiselled out to hold support timbers or 'sole plates' which in turn held uprights, forming a building over the mill. A shallow trench [84] on the south-east corner where the bedrock is higher may also have served a similar purpose to complete the rectangular structure. Mill specialist John Harrison suggests that a simple isolated structure such as this would be all that was required for an early mill, as the miller would probably travel from the village to the mill only when his services were required.⁶

The mill pond, a 'launder' or wooden trough, and a system of sluice gates to direct the water from the pond on to the mill wheel would also have been constructed at this time. A further rock-cut post hole [99] was uncovered beyond the western end of the wheel-pit that may have held the support post for this launder.

A linear cut in the bedrock along the southern side of the cog pit [87] may also have held the support timbers for the hurst. The bedrock surrounding the building also appears to have been levelled to provide access around the site. The material from continual cleaning of the tail-race appears to have been thrown up onto the bedrock of the north bank of the race where it has accumulated over many years, as seen in the test pit Tr. 3E.

The excavations have shown the building to be approximately 6.0m in length and 5.0m in width, covering an area of 30.0 sq m. A central dividing wall or wooden partition would have been necessary to separate the mill wheel from the milling machinery, in order to keep the grain and flour dry, but the overlay provided by mill specialists John Harrison and Peter Morgan (see Figure 9) demonstrates how the wheel and the rest of the equipment would have fitted into the space provided. They considered that it would not be unusual for the mill building to stand alone in this early Norman period and that it would most likely have been a single storey building with a thatched roof, although fragments of tile were found throughout the site so it is possible that the roof may have been tiled.

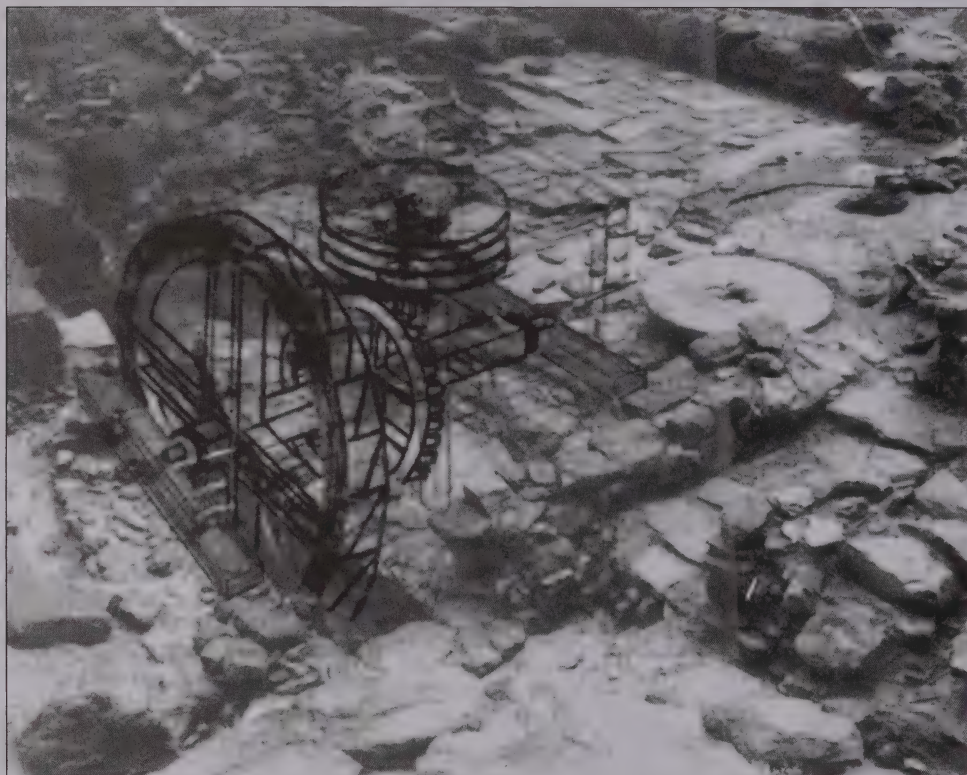


Figure 9 The position of the mill wheel and machinery within the space of the original building

2 The working life of the mill

Once constructed and established, the Yearsley watermill appears to have survived for several hundred years until its eventual demise in the early eighteenth century. Many changes will no doubt have taken place during this period, not least for maintenance, replacement and repair purposes. The mill stones, for example, may have lasted 20 to 25 years and the mill wheels only slightly longer than that, depending on their usage. Changes in technology, in an attempt to increase efficiency, may also have influenced the size of the wheel and the gearing to drive the stones; the various cuts in the bedrock [70], [86] and [100] may bear testament to these changes. The grooves in different fragments of millstone found on the site showed that

they had been cut for rotation in opposite directions suggesting different gearing mechanisms. Some were made from sandstone and some from millstone grit in a range of sizes which would also indicate that changes had taken place over the years. Peter Morgan suggests that a lay shaft may also have been fitted to operate two sets of stones, which may explain the difference in size of the stones and the different rotations.⁷

No evidence of a channel delivering water to the base of the mill wheel was found so it appears that the wheel was supplied by water from above, making it overshot, consistent with the design of the wheel found in the wheel-pit. It is possible however that earlier models may have been pitch-back or breast-shot as they would also require the water to be fed at a higher level but would rotate the wheel in the opposite direction, again possibly explaining the different design of millstones recovered from the site.

Other developments were also taking place on the site and it appears that a second building adjacent to the mill on its southern side was constructed, possibly during the late thirteenth to early fourteenth century.



Figure 10 Plan showing the position of the second mill building

Seventeen sherds of Brandsby ware pottery from this period were retrieved from context (97) which was a basal foundation layer running under the eastern wall (7) of the building. Two other pieces from the centre of wall (6) are also from this time. The building was a substantial rectangular stone-built structure measuring 13.50m in length and 5.50m in width with a wall and doorway subdividing it towards the eastern end (see Figure 10). A series of post holes was observed towards the western end that may have provided a further subdivision. A hearth and an oven or kiln had been built against the western side of the dividing wall and a flagstone floor was laid in the central area of the building. Large pieces of well-worn

millstones were used to form the hearth which would suggest that the mill had been in use for some time before the hearth was laid.

The water worn bedrock to the south of the building suggested that a purpose-built water channel had been constructed to collect and divert the drainage water from the slope above the site into the stream in Elder Slack below the mill. There was some indication that the bedrock beyond the water channel wall (4) had been exposed, possibly to form a yard or storage area. Further indications of the unexpectedly complex nature of the site were the wall and stone embankment immediately to the west of the mill building which may have been a boundary or containing wall or may have acted as a support for the launder; sherds of pottery found in the foundation layer were again of late thirteenth to early fourteenth century date, with the exception of one piece of sixteenth century Cistercian ware which was thought to be intrusive.

The second mill building and its associated structures were possibly contemporary with the original building, identified and partially excavated during the 2011-12 excavation which lay approximately 25m to the south-east.⁸ The building style, using the same local sandy limestone with an earth bonding, was similar in both cases. It is possible that the building provided accommodation for the miller and his family and that some more ephemeral agricultural buildings were present on the site, but more extensive excavations would be required to prove this theory.

A further anomaly, thrown up by the pottery analysis, was the dearth of pottery from the late fourteenth to the mid sixteenth century. Of the 6,681 sherds retrieved from the excavations, only 3 per cent were Humber ware, 2.7 per cent Hambleton ware and 0.4 per cent Cistercian ware, the only types that can be ascribed to that period; many of these may even have been residual material contained in the soil and rubble that was used to bury the site in the eighteenth century. This hiatus might suggest that the mill had fallen out of use for some time during the fourteenth to sixteenth century period or that the miller was living elsewhere and was visiting the mill only occasionally.

The reduced use of the mill may have been due to the consequences of deteriorating climate conditions. Fluctuations in weather patterns have been recorded throughout the medieval and post-medieval periods and a so-called 'Medieval Warm Period' coincided with a peak of solar activity between 800 and 1300 with a maximum between 1100 and 1250. This warmer weather, combined with improvements in agricultural practices following the Norman Conquest, led to an increase in food production and in population during this period.⁹ The number of water mills was consequently thought to have doubled between 1186 and 1300, from 5-6,000 to 10-12,000 to cater for the increased demand for bread flour. The Yearsley mill may have been part of this rapid expansion.

After the beginning of the fourteenth century, however, the climatic conditions began to deteriorate, which resulted in crop failures, poor harvests and outbreaks of animal disease well into the 1320s; consequently food shortages, soaring prices and starvation lead to population decline. There was some improvement in the following decades only to be ended by the advent of the Black Death in 1348. Estimates vary but it is thought that the population fell by 30-50 per cent as a result of the disease, returning to pre-Conquest levels. Due to continued poor weather conditions and further disease outbreaks, numbers did not recover until the sixteenth to seventeenth century.¹⁰

With fewer people to feed, grain milling declined and manorial revenues fell, so many of the mills were taken out of commission and left idle for long periods.¹¹ The remaining population may have had to travel greater distances to find a working mill or they may even have reverted to hand grinding using quern stones to produce their flour. This may have been the case at Yearsley and could explain the hiatus in the pottery count.

As labour became more expensive and more difficult to find, many landowners turned from arable farming to pasture as it was less labour intensive; some installed deer parks as a means of retaining control of their land whilst indulging their interests in chivalric and militaristic activities at the same time. This appears to have been the case on the Gilling estate when Thomas de Etton was granted rights to impark 1,000 acres in 1374. The boundary of the park or park pale appears to pass through the mill site.¹²

The Yearsley mill may have been out of commission for some time during the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries but we know that it was back in use by the mid sixteenth century as the first documentary evidence directly relating to a mill in Yearsley has been uncovered from that period. It relates to a sale document from 1559-60 when William Wildon sold a parcel of ground in Yearsley containing 'one watermilne there with sute thereof and free course of water at all times forever' to Sir Nicholas Fairfax of Gilling.¹³ The pottery recovered from the site also increases in both quantity and variety from this point through to the early to mid eighteenth century when the mill's working life appears to have come to an end.

Population levels in England remained low at around 2.5 million until the early sixteenth century when they began to rise again, gradually and intermittently, together with incomes and the general standard of living.¹⁴ These changes occurred at the same time as the manorial rights were in decline, together with the feudal farming system. The mill soke was no longer seen as valuable and many mills were farmed out, leased or sold. The eventual loss of manorial (or monastic) control led to more mills being developed, incorporating new practices and technologies as they were regarded as an increasing source of income.¹⁵ This may have been the case with the Yearsley mill which appears to have been brought back into use by this time. Richard Chapman is mentioned in the sale indenture as being a tenant of the mill at the time of its transfer in 1559-60.

The mill appears to have continued in use from at least the sixteenth century and it has been possible to identify some of the other millers from local parish records. The sequence is incomplete, but later tenants were John and possibly Thomas Dinnison around the 1660s, followed by George Yoward from 1684-5 to 1724. Yoward appears to have been the last Yearsley miller and the mill's demise may have followed his death in the 1720s.

One context in particular appears to bear witness to the changes that had taken place during the working life of the mill, and that is the layer of sandy gravelly clay thrown up on to the north bank of the tail-race as a result of repeated cleaning operations. 193 sherds of pottery were recovered from this layer, covering the period from the twelfth to the early eighteenth century with a hiatus around the late fourteenth to the late sixteenth century from which period only seven small and abraded sherds were recorded. No clear horizons were observed within the context due to the homogenous nature of the material but it does appear to represent a picture of the mill's history.

The date and duration of the mill's possible temporary closure during the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries has been difficult to identify, partly because of the imprecise nature of the

transition from one type of local pottery to another; Brandsby wares through Hambleton and Humber wares to the early Ryedale wares, for example, all appear to have blurred boundaries and their production and usage will no doubt have overlapped to a greater or lesser extent. One possible scenario is that the mill may have been forced to close following the Black Death in 1349, but it may have been reactivated before 1374 as the site appears to have been incorporated into the south-western sector of the deer park boundary, and possibly also acted as an entrance or lodge gate, although it should be stressed that there is no documentary evidence to support this theory. An alternative might be that the mill may have remained in operation, albeit at a reduced output, but the remainder of the site was abandoned. The miller may also have lived in the village at that time, with a second occupation, only visiting the mill when necessary. There would, therefore, have been little or no domestic activity around the site to create the pottery waste.

3 The demise of the mill

Following the demise of the water mill, the site appears to have continued in use for several years before its eventual burial as part of a landscaping process. Evidence for this episode mainly centres around the wheel-pit, tail-race and cog pit areas; once milling had been abandoned, these low-lying waterlogged areas appear to have been allowed to silt up and gradually become clogged with vegetation. Representative paleo-environmental samples taken from this area and analysed by Durham University Archaeological Services showed a range of waterlogged plant remains, including ruderal weeds such as chickweed, campions and dead-nettles. Trees such as elder, birch and alder were also present, as well as wetland plants including rushes and sedges. The build-up of this organic material was over 1.0m deep in places and the well-preserved roots and stumps of shrubs and small trees were also observed to have become established within it, indicating that the material had taken some considerable time to accumulate, perhaps as long as 10 to 20 years. The waterlogged material was eventually buried and sealed by the landscaping process, an event that helped to preserve it together with other artefacts such as the leather and wood that were also present.

Other activities were no doubt taking place on the site in the years after the mill had gone out of use; further results from the paleo-environmental analysis showed the presence of rachis (chaff) from rye and bread wheat, which may have blown in from neighbouring fields but is more likely the result of threshing or cleaning these cereals for their storage as grain. This would suggest that the occupants were still farming the land around the mill after its demise.

The presence of the crushing stone (Figure 11) might also suggest other activities on the site such as the crushing of apples for verjuice, oak bark for tannin or cereals for animal feed. The observation that a hole had been punched through the southern wall of the building to redirect the water originally flowing in a channel around the building may also be significant. The water may have served some domestic or industrial purpose such as the brewing of ale; pieces of several large storage jars and cisterns were recorded in the pottery finds that would have been suitable for this purpose.¹⁶ A collection of small brass pins and other decorative pieces of brass may indicate dressmaking activities; strips of leather, hammers, chisels, knives and abundant nails may also suggest that other craft activities or general maintenance tasks were taking place on the site both before and after the demise of the mill.

There were also indications that modifications were made to the building after the milling had finished. For example, the wall at the western end of the cog pit had been built over an earlier rock-cut post hole, and only abutted the earlier wall.

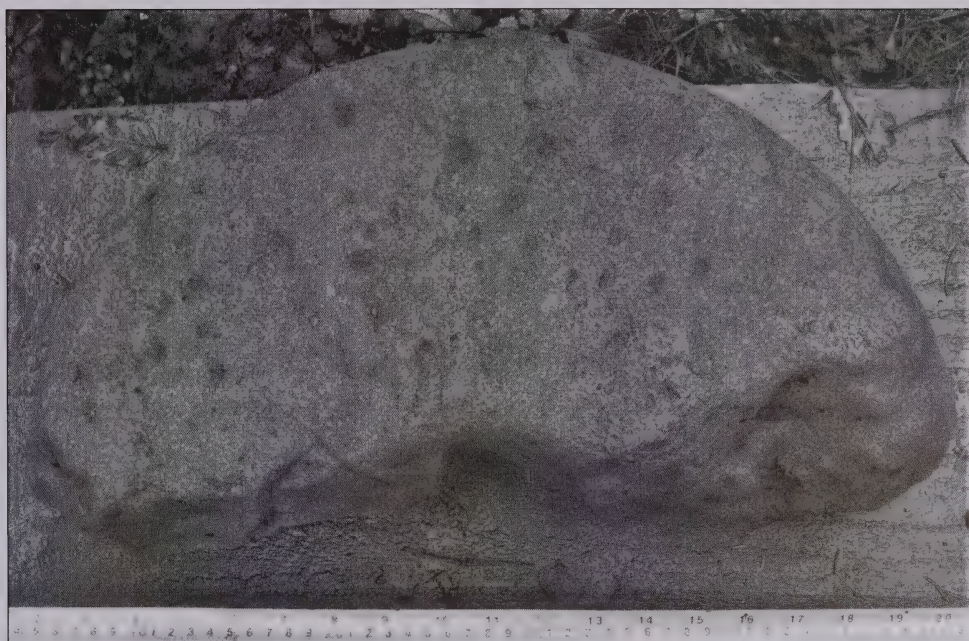


Figure 11 Fragment of a crushing stone

The majority of the 53 sherds recovered from the earth-bonding material from within this wall were of a seventeenth to early eighteenth century date, suggesting that it was a later modification and that the building continued in use after the mill had come to an end. The stone embankment to the west of the wheel-pit provided a similar array of pottery; 62 sherds were recovered from this feature, 60 of which were Hambleton or Ryedale wares dating from the sixteenth to early eighteenth century, again suggesting a later construction date for this feature. It was possibly built as an enclosure wall to keep animals out of the site or to keep farm livestock in. It may have remained in place after the landscaping process as it lies on the Gilling Park boundary, only to be reduced and hidden by subsequent farming and forestry activities, in common with much of the remainder of the boundary wall.

4 The demolition and subsequent burial of the mill

The final demolition of the buildings and the subsequent burial of the site would appear to have been a very thorough and labour-intensive process. The walls were reduced to less than a metre in height and much of the better-quality stone appears to have been removed together with the roof timbers for use elsewhere. Nevertheless, a substantial amount of stone was left within the rubble covering the floor and the area surrounding the building. There were no signs of organic material and no evidence of burning within the debris, so if the building had been thatched, the thatch was removed first. It is possible that the roof was tiled as fragments of flat ceramic tile, some with nibs, were found within the rubble.

Following the demolition of the buildings, the whole site was covered with vast quantities of soil and rubble, and it is the source of this material that is, as yet, unclear. Some of it appears

to have come from close at hand as it contains mill-related artefacts such as fragments of mill stones and broken bearings, while the remainder may have been brought in by the cartload from elsewhere or simply from a nearby rubbish dump.

The great quantity of pottery sherds amongst the rubble is one anomaly that has been difficult to explain; context (18), for example, produced 1,953 sherds. A pottery kiln was thought to be one possible source of the sherds and a kiln was one of the items listed on the Papist Register of 1720, but it is not clear what sort of kiln this may have been; possibilities include a lime-kiln or a corn drying kiln as well as a pottery kiln. However, only five of the sherds were thought to be kiln waste, and despite extensive searches in the area of the mill, no trace of a kiln or of kiln furniture has been found, so it is unlikely that this was the source.

One alternative is that the material has been brought down from Yearsley village where John Wedgwood and his later family were believed to have been producing pottery from the mid seventeenth to the early eighteenth century, similar to the Ryedale wares found on the mill site, although no kiln site has yet been identified in the village.¹⁷ It should also be noted that Ryedale ware pottery was being produced elsewhere in the area, in Grimston and in Gilling for example, which are only slightly further away from the mill than Yearsley and could have been another source of the rubble; but the impracticality of carting large quantities of rubble over such distances also seems to make this alternative unlikely particularly if there was a supply closer to hand.

What is also incongruous about the pottery assemblage within the rubble is the high proportion of earlier (twelfth to fourteenth century) material that it contained; in contexts (11) and (15) it made up 28 to 30 per cent of the total, mostly local Brandsby wares, and in context (59) of the 111 sherds, up to 47 per cent were of earlier types, but of the 1,953 sherds in context (18) only 10 per cent were early. This might suggest that the soil and rubble had been collected either from separate dumps or different parts of one large dump but, whatever the source, it appears to have accumulated over several hundred years, much longer than the Wedgwoods' period of making pottery in Yearsley. Many of the Ryedale sherds recovered were also from vessels associated with brewing or verjuice production and other domestic activities linked with the mill. Very few were identified as kiln waste, and given that the rubble also contained other mill related artefacts it appears most likely that the material was from a deposit close to the mill.

Once dumped on the mill site, the soil and rubble appear to have been mixed and spread quite widely over the area, which made the horizons diffuse and difficult to identify. Several inter-connecting pieces of pottery were also retrieved from widely differing contexts, a further indication of this mixing process: for example, cross-joining sherds were found in contexts (1), (11), (16) and (30).¹⁸

It is thought that the Fairfax family started their landscaping project in Gilling Park in the 1720s and that it continued for a further fifty years.¹⁹ During this time many features, including two ornamental temples, a flight of lakes and an avenue, were installed as well as the Wilderness area in which the mill had previously been situated. Given the Romantic and Picturesque status attributed to watermills during this period,²⁰ it is perhaps surprising that the remains of the mill were not left as a ruin within the Wilderness.

The charm and allure of watermills still holds as true today as it did when George Eliot wrote *The Mill on the Floss* in 1860 with 'the unresting wheel sending out its diamond jets of

water’.²¹ Because of their unique attraction, many have been restored and a fine working example can be seen at Tocketts Mill near Guisborough NZ6268 1815.²² Extensive research and partial restoration have also taken place at nearby Coulton Mill SE6424 7366,²³ providing an extremely attractive place to live and work. This is true of many watermills throughout the country but the unique attraction of Yearsley Mill has been the lack of prior knowledge of its existence, the isolated beauty of its location and the idea of the site having been ‘frozen in time’ for almost three centuries.

A work voucher dated 18 September 1748 for building a wall from ‘Thomas Bulmer wall over to the ould mill’ suggests that the mill was gone by this time, the ‘wall’ possibly being the park boundary that passes through the site today.²⁴ The Yearsley Mill appears to have slipped from sight and from local memory from this time in the mid eighteenth century. Apart from some adjacent forestry planting, the site has been left largely untouched since then and might have continued in this state for many years to come had it not been for the keen-eyed members of the Yearsley Moor Archaeology Project survey team who rediscovered it in 2011. Further work could be carried out to establish the full extent of the site, the presence of other structures or features and the relationship between the first excavated building and the mill, but it is a tribute to the dedicated members of the YMRP team that so much has already been achieved to preserve the memory of the mill from such unlikely beginnings.

The final report on the excavation of the mill and the list of finds can be accessed at <http://www.helmsleyarchaeologicalandhistoricalsociety.org.uk/news.htm>,²⁵ which also has a link to an orthophotographic survey of the site undertaken by Professor Dominic Powlesland of the Landscape Research Centre, Yedingham, North Yorkshire. This has provided a 3D model of the area which enables the viewer to navigate around the site and observe individual features in greater detail.

Acknowledgements

The successful completion of the Yearsley Mill Research Project would not have been possible without the untiring efforts of the core group of excavators: Gordon and Wendy Bennett, Lyn and Ken Gilding, Phil and Steve Bassett, Brian Walker, Di Prest, David Roberts and Judy Bradfield.

Help and support for the project has also been freely given by community archaeologist Dr Jon Kenny, mill specialists John K. Harrison and Peter Morgan, documentary researcher Mary Peters, and by Steve Young with his enthusiastic group of North York Moors National Park Authority apprentices.

The initial stages of the project were financed by a generous donation from the Helmsley Archaeological and Historical Society, but the major part of the costs have been met by the Forestry Commission through their field officer Katie Thorn. A great deal of the credit should go to Katie for her hard work in ensuring that the project has been a success.

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The higher status of women before the Georgian era and their subsequent subjugation

David Brewer

Recent research into a family that were Lords of the Manor of Ryton,¹ a now deserted village in Ryedale, led to the realisation that in the distant past married women had much more control over their affairs than some previous historians have suggested. In fact the records show that women seem to have been equal partners in marriage with both husband and wife looking after their joint interests for the benefit of their children. So why have these wives effectively been written out of history, and why do we now have the apparently wrong presumption that in the past a married woman was totally subservient to her husband and he could do whatever he liked with her property and possessions?

Historians do seem to have recognised that single women and widows had no problems owning property and independently managing their own affairs. This is shown quite succinctly in the Domesday Survey of Yorkshire when Countess Judith,² King William's niece, retained all her lands and those of her husband, Earl Waltheof of Northumbria, after her husband's death. She also had no problem passing these lands on to her descendants, all daughters. Locally widows were even Lords of the Manor, with Joan Wake widow of John (Kirkbymoorside) and Joan Percehay widow of Roger of Wrelton (Crambe, Ryton and Hildenley) being listed as responsible for their respective Knight's Fees in 1302.³ It could be argued in both cases that these ladies were only Lords of the Manor pending a relative coming of age, but in 1315-16 the *Nomina Villarum* still listed Joan Percehay as the Vill holder at Ryton⁴ despite the fact that the male Percehay heir, her nephew Walter, son of her brother Robert Percehay and Joan Vesci, was already in his twenties and he was listed as Vill holder at Crambe.⁵

But what about the status of women who were still married? The records for gifts to local religious houses in Ryedale show that a husband needed his wife's permission to dispose of family assets. The gift by Ralph Neville of land at Ryton⁶ to the 'Church of the Blessed Mary of Rievallis' not only required the consent of his son and heir, Gaufridi, as it was his inheritance that was being given away, but also the consent of Ralph's wife Hadewise, as she was jointly responsible for the management of the family assets. A gift by Adam de Vermentles⁷ of income from land in Laysthorpe (between Stonegrave and Oswaldkirk) 'to God and St Mary and the abbot and convent of Byland' required 'the assent and goodwill of Albreda his wife'. In this case the legal document was 'Sealed with the seal of Albreda and with that of Adam', which demonstrates that Albreda had her own seal matrix and made her own legal contracts. From the same source⁸ Samson of Laysthorpe granted the interests in one bovate in Laysthorpe to the convent of Byland; again he needed his wife's authority to do this and she also used her own seal to confirm her agreement.

The above examples are from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, but the situation is even more clearly demonstrated by three Yorkshire Fines of the sixteenth century concerning land sales by the Percehay family in Ryton. Fines were a way of formally recording the transfer of property, and the system is explained in detail in the Preface of Volume 2 of the Yorkshire Archaeological Society's Record Series.⁹ A Fine for Michaelmas Term 19 Hen VIII [1527] shows that 'Walter Percehay esq. and William Percehay and Johanna [Joan] his wife' sold 'Lands in Riton' to 'John Todde and Simon Todde'. At that time William was Lord of the

Manor of Ryton, having succeeded his father Leo to this position despite the fact that the eldest son Walter was still alive. Succession did not necessarily always pass to the eldest son, and in this case it may have been because at Leo's death Walter's wife had already died, they had not produced any children, and Walter had not remarried, so it made sense for the title to pass to William who already had four children. As the eldest son, Walter's permission still seems to have been required to dispose of family assets, but it is the need for the permission of William's wife that is of interest. She was Joan, daughter of John Vavasour of Hazlewood Castle, but the land in question was not part of any inheritance she may have brought to the marriage. In fact the land in question had by then been in the possession of the Percehay family for well over 300 years, so why did William need his wife's permission to sell it? Five years later, Easter Term 24 Hen VIII [1532], William again sold 'Lands in Ryton', this time to his neighbour Roger Cholmeley, but the record shows he did not need the permission of anyone else. This is because by then his brother was deceased (by 1530) and William's wife Joan had also died¹⁰ but William had not yet remarried, so he was in sole control of all the Percehay family lands. By the time of the next sale of land William was married to a widow, Elizabeth Tyrswick, daughter of Thomas Hurst a merchant of London.¹¹ In addition to the note of this sale in the public record of the Fines, an original copy of the indenture is extant in the archives of the Yorkshire Archaeological and Historical Society.¹² This document gives all the details of the sale on 6 August in the twenty-seventh year of the reign of Henry VIII [1535] of 'one Close in Ryton in the County of Yorke callyd the West Felde or Oxfelde Close' by 'William Percehay esquier & Elesabethe hys wyffe' to 'Robert Crayk esquier and Isabell hys wyffe'. This document proves that both wives were actively involved in the transaction, with William and Elizabeth endorsing the sale with their signatures, showing that the document is actually the copy retained by Robert and Isabell. Yes, Elizabeth really did sign for herself as she was literate, and her later will¹³ shows that she was also firmly in control of her own possessions, giving detailed instructions for their distribution after her death. Again the land being sold was not brought to the marriage by the wife, but Elizabeth had to be involved because she was looking after the interests of herself, her husband and the Percehay heirs and these included her own son Leonard Percehay.

These examples clearly show that married women played an active part in legal processes. This is emphasised even more when wills are examined. The earliest extant Percehay will is that of Sir Walter,¹⁴ dated 'AD 1344 Tuesday next after the feast of Saint Thomas [21 December]'. It is obvious from his will that Walter treated his wife as an equal, and certainly not as his chattel! He left many bequests befitting his wealth and status, including gifts to his wife Agnes and to **all** his children, not just his eldest son and heir. Significantly he had no problems with appointing Agnes the principle executrix, with his sons only being sub-administrators. Agnes was clearly capable of acting on her husband's behalf, and her own will¹⁵ four years later emphasised both her legal independence and her own personal wealth. A similar situation is recorded in the will of Prudence Percehay dated 6 October 39 Elizabeth [1597]¹⁶ where she had substantial wealth under her own control. Again she distributed gifts to all her children, and had no problem appointing 'Anne Percehay my daughter' as sole executrix despite having four adult sons alive and well at that time. Both Agnes and Prudence were widows when they made their wills, and two items in Magna Carta¹⁷ gave them, as widows, very specific legal protection. After the death of her husband a widow could not be forced to remarry so long as she wished to live without a husband. In addition she was entitled to her marriage portion and her inheritance. Her inheritance was what she brought to the marriage, being her part of her own family's estates, sometimes referred to as the child's portion that was passed on to each child. Her marriage portion¹⁸ was the dowry given to the bride at the time of her wedding. To understand this original use of the term 'dowry' it is

necessary to look at the one formal contract entered into by the man and woman on marriage. The state was not really involved in marriage until the Marriage Act of 1753 which laid down the rules to be adhered to if a marriage was to be considered legally binding. From Elizabethan times up to 1753 'marriages could take place anywhere provided they were conducted before an ordained clergyman of the Church of England.'¹⁹ However, before then marriage was an unregulated process and this could lead to serious problems if someone was thought to be illegitimate, with all the legal hereditary problems that could cause. To avoid this a marriage ceremony was usually conducted involving the church, thus ensuring a record of the event. The wording and form of the religious service performed would be recognisable today and as early as the twelfth century a missal [a book containing the texts used in a Catholic Mass] from Bury St. Edmunds²⁰ included texts to be used during the Mass when marrying a man and woman. One of the key requirements was that both the bride and groom had to willingly give their consent. 'When both have given their consent the settlement and other gifts, as agreed between them, are brought forward and given to the woman.'²¹ At the giving of the ring by the groom to the bride he said, 'With this ring I thee wed, this gold and silver I thee give, with my body I thee worship, and with this dowry I thee endow.'²² The wording of the marriage service remained virtually unchanged up to the dawn of the Reformation, and the Sarum Manual²³ printed in 1543 used the same words when the groom gives the ring, but with the last phrase being 'and with all my worldly chattel I thee endow.' The words used at the giving of the ring in the new *Book of Common Prayer* published in 1552 were amended slightly and are those used into the twentieth century: 'With this ring I thee wed, with my body I thee worship, and with all my worldly goods I thee endow.' This very one-sided giving of all his worldly goods by the groom to the bride, with nothing in return, did result in comments such as this by H. L'Estrange²⁴ in his *Alliance of Divine Offices* published in 1659, page 295; 'Why is not the subarration, the giving of earnest, reciprocal and mutual? Why doth not the woman give somewhat to the man ...?'²⁵

So the marriage service, which by default was the binding contract, had the groom giving everything to the bride but with nothing being given by the bride to the groom. It could be argued that this was because a separate marriage contract had been agreed between both families concerned before the marriage took place, with whatever the bride was going to bring to the marriage agreed in advance: this was no doubt the situation in some cases. The will of Lyon/Leo Percehay dated 24 May 1516²⁶ referred to 'covenantes of marriage between Lyon Percehay, Katryn my wyffe, and Walter Percehay of the one partie, and John Vavasour of Yorke of the other partie' concerning Lyon's son William and John's daughter Joan. Unfortunately these covenants of marriage have not survived, but a copy of a later indenture dated 1 July 1580²⁷ gives an idea of how contracts were worded in order to make sure that a daughter's property remained within the bloodline of her family. This indenture concerns property in Ryton owned by George Mountforde who wanted to pass it to his only daughter and heir apparent Elizabeth, who was then married to a George Moore. The document seems to be unnecessarily verbose and complicated, showing how the legal profession even by then were firmly in control and intent on remaining so. Briefly, George Mountforde ensured that 'all his said lands ... shall remain immediately from his death unto Elizabeth in tail and to the heirs male of her body lawfully begotten' showing the perennial bias against female heirs, despite the fact that his daughter Elizabeth was exactly that. Note the lands were not given to the husband George Moore, and the document was worded in such a way as to prevent him from taking control at any time, although if Elizabeth predeceased him he did have the benefit for life. At his death, and in the absence of male children, the lands reverted back to the male heirs of Elizabeth's family. George Moore's responsibility was to make sure there was a male heir and, as it transpired, a male heir Francis was produced.

This system of returning the wife's inheritance back to her family in the absence of children, and the tradition of both husband and wife retaining benefits up to the second death, is confirmed in other documents concerning Ryton. A document dated 12 April 1523²⁸ seems to have been created to confirm that Johanna Pickering, the sister of Walter and William Percehay, had all rights to certain lands in Kirby Misperton after the death of her husband John Pickering, these lands being her inheritance. This may have been to stop John's family from claiming them as theirs – no issue had been produced so the lands remained with her as it was her inheritance from her own family. An indenture dated 1 January 1604²⁹ shows that land granted to Joan Percehay on her marriage to Robert Bower, given to Joan and her heirs, reverted back to the Percehay family after her death, not to Robert's family, as Robert had already died and so had their only child Richard, who died without issue. A later indenture, dated 14 September 1655,³⁰ concerning more land in Ryton again shows the system of holding property for both lives for the benefit of offspring, in this case for the benefit of all the children except the first-born son and heir as he was already catered for.

It would appear from the documents examined that well into the seventeenth century brides actually received the dowry and married women really were independent legal entities quite able to manage their own and even their deceased husband's affairs. They could own property in their own right, although both wife and husband needed the other's permission to dispose of assets that were held by them for the benefit of their children, and in practice all assets seem to have been held for the benefit of the next generation. So just when did married women effectively become disenfranchised and totally dominated by their husbands (at least in the eyes of the law); and why do we now have such a misunderstanding of the original system of dowry? Both these questions are connected. The first question has been posed before, notably by Mary Ritter Beard in her highly original and important work *Woman as Force in History: A Study in the Traditions and Realities* published in 1946 by MacMillan. A current collection of her works³¹ has the following on the back cover: 'Mary Ritter Beard (1876-1958) can rightly be called the founding mother of the field of American women's history. A genuinely visionary thinker, Beard devoted her life to reconstructing women's past – a past that had remained largely unstudied, undocumented, and unacknowledged before she began her groundbreaking work. She held the firm conviction that women had a far greater impact on history than male historians had ever recognised ...' Beard agreed that up to the end of the seventeenth century married women were equal partners in the marriage, and she traced the growing dominance of husbands over their wives to the middle of the eighteenth century. By that time the legal profession in England wanted to assert that by marriage husband and wife became one person in law, and that person was the husband. This situation was formally propounded in 1769 by William Blackstone in his *Commentaries on the Laws of England* where he stated that 'the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during the marriage.'³² Obviously the lot of married women had deteriorated by the time this assertion was made, and it was from this time that the dominance of the husband in marriage really began. If true, this assertion meant that a married woman could not own property, sign legal documents, or enter into any contract without her husband's consent, but conversely he did not need his wife's consent to do anything, even with her possessions. Of course the legal profession knew, as has been shown, that the assertion simply was not true but society, including (perhaps especially) the legal profession, wanted this to be true and so eventually it became accepted as true under the name of legal fiction: 'an assumption that something is true even though it may be untrue, made esp. in judicial reasoning to develop the law'.³³ This particular legal fiction, that the husband and wife were one person in law with all that that entailed, eventually became accepted as legal fact and was the reason that married women were so badly treated under the law by the Victorian era. This also resulted in Victorian

historians having such a prejudiced view of the role and status of women in the earliest times, believing they were totally insignificant and their votes and voices counted for nothing; that was how it was to them, so that was how it must always have been. This new legal situation was never actually written into English law so it was always open to challenge. However, when the USA created its Constitution, ratified in 1788, it was based on English law but with this legal fiction included, so from the very beginning women in America had this inferior status forced upon them and no legal challenge was possible.

The answer to the question about dowry also concerns Americans. The *Oxford English Dictionary* still shows one definition of dowry (n. 3) as 'a present or gift given by a man for his bride', confirming the information above from the marriage vows used into the sixteenth century, but this definition is shown as obsolete. Today of course the accepted definition of dowry (n. 2) is 'the money or property the wife brings her husband; the portion given with the wife'. [The first entry (n. 1) refers to dower and is also shown as obsolete.] This complete change around of meanings can, at least in part, be blamed on rich American families in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries trying to buy their way into European, preferably but not exclusively English, titled aristocracy and into the society that went with that class. This system is extremely well documented in *To Marry an English Lord*³⁴ and is based on historical facts; the book claims to have inspired the fictional TV series *Downton Abbey*. The only way to get a title of any description was to marry a man either with a title or about to inherit one, because the hereditary system did not permit titles to pass to women. Consequently all the traffic was one way, with daughters of extremely rich American industrialists, businessmen and financiers being advertised with dowries large enough to attract Englishmen with titles or heirs to a title. Conversely the English family with the title and an eligible son, but virtually bankrupt, seized the opportunity to refill their coffers. What became a tradition is well illustrated by the Dukes of Marlborough.³⁵ The 8th Duke used the funds supplied by the wealthy widow Lillian Price Hammersley to re-roof Blenheim, and his son the 9th Duke finished the restoration using even more funds provided by Consuelo Vanderbilt, heir to some of the Vanderbilt fortune. Victorian and Edwardian society became fixated by this giving of daughters with huge sums of money. The associated publicity was spread by the media of the day to a watching populous eager to read about how the aristocracy lived and as a result 'dowry' came to mean just one thing: how much money could a bride, any bride, bring to a groom, any groom with or without a title or position to trade in return. Of course, as the daughters with the money were from America, the settlement documents were drawn up by their family's American lawyers who made the assumption that the man could do what he liked with his new wife's inheritance and might well squander it all. In addition, it soon became clear that some of these marriages were not made in heaven and could end in divorce. In order to counter both these possibilities these shrewd lawyers constructed marriage contracts in a similar way to those in use centuries earlier. As a result, the 9th Duke of Marlborough only received the income from Beech Creek Railway stock,³⁶ not the stock itself which remained under the control of the Vanderbilt family, and his brother Lord Randolph Churchill had the indignity of not only being limited to the income from his wife Jennie's inheritance,³⁷ not the inheritance itself, but her father Leonard Jerome somehow managed to ensure his daughter had a separate income to manage herself despite the prevailing assumption that she had no legal existence without her husband.

The position of married women had deteriorated to the point where they had effectively become little more than one of the chattels of their husbands. Unfortunately it was during the Victorian and Edwardian periods that our main sources of history were written, including books, translations and transcriptions, and all the prejudices of the time, especially the bias

against women, were reflected in these works. This is well illustrated in Yorkshire by the Yorkshire Archaeological and Historical Society, as it is now known, with their publication the *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal*. The first volume was printed in 1870, but it took 21 years and over 200 articles before a woman's name appeared as a contributor. She was Mrs. Arthur Cecil Tempest writing about one of her husband's ancestors Nicholas Tempest; note that she was referred to as the wife of her husband, reflecting the tradition of the day and speaking volumes about the status of women at that time. The male domination of Victorian society is also emphasised by a look at the first list of members of the YAHS given in Journal no. 5 dated 1879; out of 466 members only 10 were women, although considering the times it is quite surprising that there were any. The other major source of information concerning the history of Yorkshire is the publications of the Surtees Society, founded in 1834 by 108 members, all men; by 1887 the membership had increased to 263 but only four of these were women. History as written by all these Victorian men, with their own very particular standpoint and with such ingrained prejudice against women, has resulted in the very myopic view of women's role in history still prevalent today.

As long ago as 1946 Mary Ritter Beard had pointed out that women had a far greater impact on history than male historians had ever recognised, but we still do not seem to have acknowledged this. The role of women in history is constantly being debated, but our perceived view is never going to change until history is rewritten removing all the misogynistic bias that is so evident in existing works. Perhaps this can only be done by women rewriting their history for themselves.

Postscript

This article was inspired by research into a particular family based in Ryedale, but the basic principles discovered were just as relevant to women in the rest of England. One obvious example is Elizabeth Talbot, Countess of Shrewsbury, more commonly known as Bess of Hardwick. This woman continues to be portrayed as accumulating her wealth by devious means from four husbands against all the odds, whereas it would appear that she acquired what was rightfully hers to keep by the rules of the day, as outlined above, and the agreements she had made and was legally entitled to make. The bad press she has since received can be traced back to the vitriol of the people who had tried to take advantage of her vulnerable position, only to find that she was quite capable of fighting for and retaining what was rightfully hers. These bitter comments have been repeated and embellished by subsequent historians, but fortunately Mary S Lovell completed extremely thorough research for her biography *Bess of Hardwick*,³⁸ giving 'a portrait of Bess that we have not fully seen before'.³⁹ From this work it is clear that Bess never was anyone's chattel and that she operated completely within the rules as they existed at the time. Hopefully historians in the future will devote the same energy to rewriting the history of other women who have been subjected to similar prejudice.

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Fyling deer park wall, Fylingdales, North Yorkshire

Ed Dennison

Introduction

A project to record the condition of Fyling deer park wall, and its associated stone crosses, was undertaken by Ed Dennison Archaeological Services (EDAS) prior to and during a programme of repair and partial rebuilding between October 2016 and August 2017. The following provides a summary of the results while the full survey report has been deposited at the North York Moors National Park Authority (NYMNP) Historic Environment Record at Helmsley.¹

The former Fyling deer park, which lies 1.2km to the south-west of Fylingthorpe, is centred on Low Park Wood and the Ramsdale Beck which runs broadly east-west through the park (see Figure 1, where the boundary alignment named ‘Park Wall’ is shown in heavy black).



Figure 1 Boundary of Fyling Park as depicted on 1853 Ordnance Survey 6-inch maps²

While the majority of the park's boundaries now appear to have been lost, or are represented by later alignments, the best-preserved length is that which forms the south side of the park, across Swallow Head and west of Demesne House (now Demesne Farm). This section is about 700m long and its defining characteristic is that it contains large stone crosses, placed at about 15m intervals (see Figures 3 and 5). About thirty crosses were said to survive, reflecting the fact that the deer park was originally owned by the Abbots of Whitby.³ This part of the deer park boundary is protected as a Scheduled Monument.⁴

Medieval deer parks

Deer parks are a common characteristic of the medieval landscape. They were mostly relatively small, rarely exceeding 200 acres (80 hectares), in contrast to the larger hunting grounds such as forests or chases, and they were created and owned by the higher echelons of medieval society, both secular and monastic. Deer parks were defined by a physical boundary which also served to provide a legal boundary. These boundaries were not necessarily static, as parks often expanded or contracted according to the status and wealth of the owner, and they could be wholly man-made (for example, wooden fences or 'pales', a hedged bank, substantial walls, and so on), or utilise prominent natural features such as scarps, ridges, becks and rivers, or be a combination of both. The optimum shape for a deer park would be circular or sub-circular, and a defining characteristic is a ditch which runs along the inside of the boundary, which would have had the effect of increasing its height, to prevent deer from escaping; fully-grown deer can leap up to 6m horizontally and 3m vertically.⁵

The interior of a deer park was usually sub-divided into several different areas, given over to leisure (different forms of hunting), woodland management (for the production of timber), and/or the grazing or cultivation of other animals, such as fish (in deliberately created ponds), horses, rabbits and cattle; these divisions became more commonplace in the later medieval period. A deer park might also contain a number of buildings, such as a park-keeper's house, a hunting lodge, viewing towers, and agricultural buildings associated with the animals kept within.⁶

The history and development of Fyling park

It is thought that Fyling deer park was established and owned by the Abbots of Whitby, and it was probably laid out adjacent to the Forest of Pickering in the twelfth century, when much of this area was purchased by the abbey.⁷ The abbey established an outlying grange, possibly on the site of the later Fyling Hall (now Fyling Old Hall Farm), with a mixed agricultural regime; the fact that this ground was never particularly productive may have been one of the reasons for the establishment of the monastic deer park in this area.

Rimington notes that the deer park is well documented, although not before the fourteenth century, but few of the records have been published, or are otherwise readily available. The 1327-28 Lay Subsidy for Fyling township includes 'Henry le Parker' and 'John le Parker', two of the abbot's officers in the park, while the *Inquisition Post Mortem* of Abbot Peter of Whitby (1394) reports that the large sum of £5 was needed for the repair of the walls and buildings of Fyling park.⁸ The abbot's park is further mentioned in 1404,⁹ and the local antiquary, Revd. J C Atkinson (1814-1900), writing in 1898, considered the deer park wall to be of considerable age, having been described in the Whitby Chartulary as being 'The Olde Walles'.¹⁰

Little is known about the management and use of the park, but it is thought that Fyling Hall was the location of the abbot's hunting lodge, just outside the presumed boundaries of the park. An area near Park Gate, at the northern corner of the park, called 'Horse Close', is mentioned in the abbey's early sixteenth century rent rolls, and is a reminder of the common practice of horse breeding in deer parks.¹¹

After the Dissolution, in 1550, the monastic lands encompassing Fylingdales were granted to the Earl of Warwick by Edward VI, but the following year the earl conveyed them to his supporter Sir John York who shortly afterwards sold them to Sir Richard Cholmley of Roxby Castle, although Sir Richard had actually been leasing the monastic holding of 500 acres (202 hectares) since 1539-40.¹² Sir Richard's purchase took place on 1 July 1555 and comprised about 22,000 acres including the manor of Fyling, which itself included the former abbot's grange, deer park and lodge at Fyling Hall.¹³

During the first decades of the seventeenth century, Sir Hugh Cholmley entrusted most of his lands either to his younger brother, Sir Henry, or to members of his wife's family, the Twysdens. However, he retained Fyling manor for himself, and in 1622 the hunting lodge, its eight neighbouring farms and extensive walled deer park were included in Elizabeth Twysden's marriage portion and valued at £200 a year.¹⁴ Fyling Hall comprised about 250-278 acres, and was the largest of the Cholmley farms in the area. The former monastic deer park lodge was substantially rebuilt by Sir Hugh Cholmley in 1629, possibly by adding a wing to the earlier structure, although much has been concealed by subsequent early nineteenth century alterations by John Barry.¹⁵

Although the Cholmleys may initially have used the deer park for hunting, it appears to have become neglected during the early seventeenth century, especially after they created a new and more convenient park adjacent to their new house, Abbey House in Whitby.¹⁶ Fyling Park is confirmed as being 'dissolved' in a sale of 1634,¹⁷ and it was presumably already effectively part of the more generally farmed landscape, part of the Cholmleys' Fyling Hall holding. This scenario reflects the general demise of medieval deer parks in the fifteenth century, when many fell out of use, the number of deer dwindled, and labour was no longer available to maintain them properly. As a result, many parks were disimparked or existed in name only, and increasingly pasture within them was leased out for long periods, a trend which followed the decline of direct demesne farming.¹⁸

In 1634 Sir Hugh Cholmley sold Fyling Hall, the deer park, ten farms and a water mill for £4,400 to Sir John Hotham of Beverley (1589-1645), then High Sheriff of Yorkshire and a cousin who had in the past stood surety for some of the family debts; Fyling Hall itself was valued at £800 within this settlement. The conveyance of this sale notes 'all that capital messuage, parcel of the manor of Fileing commonly called by the name of Fileing Hall wherein the said Sir Hugh Cholmley then dwelt...', and fields called 'the high parke', 'horseparke' and the 'parke close' are specifically named.¹⁹ In the 1690s no gamekeepers were appointed, and it was said that the deer were destroyed and the park was broken up.²⁰ The estate remained with the Hotham family until 1819 when another Sir John Hotham sold it to John Barry, a member of a long established ship-building family in Whitby. John and Robert Barry significantly improved the holding, through the creation of new planned farmsteads at Howgate, Demense and Low Farms, undertook substantial repairs and alterations at Fyling Hall, and built themselves a fine Tudor-revival mansion at Park Gate (now Fyling Hall School). The Barrys sold their interest after 1920 and the area dissolved into multiple ownership.²¹

Although it was always associated with Fyling Hall, and was within its landholding, the full extent of the boundaries of the deer park are not known with any degree of certainty. It has already been established elsewhere that there are no pre-nineteenth century maps depicting the area of the park, although there are a number that show adjacent or neighbouring lands, such as a Hotham estate map of 1723 which depicts fields and lanes bounding on to the north side of the park, as well as a cottage on or near the site of Low Farm after its early nineteenth century construction.²² However, the Ordnance Survey maps of 1853 and 1893 name and depict sections of the 'Park Wall' as a solid or disused field boundary, with some lengths lost in woodland or along roads and tracks (see Figure 1).²³ The fact that the boundary forming the eastern side of the park is named as 'Site of Park Wall' whereas the rest is all 'Park Wall' implies that the majority was still intact in 1853.

The alignment of the park boundary encloses an irregularly shaped area of ground, named as 'Fyling Park' and centred on Low Park Wood (formerly Ramsdale Wood) and the Ramsdale Beck, although the significantly-named fields given in earlier documents ('High Park', 'Horse Park' and 'Park Close') are not shown. The outline of the park as shown by Rimington is broadly similar to that shown in 1853, although it seems to include Park Hill within the north-east corner (see Figure 2), and the 1853 Ordnance Survey map also names a Park Gate Farm and Park Gate Plantation in this general area (see Figure 1).

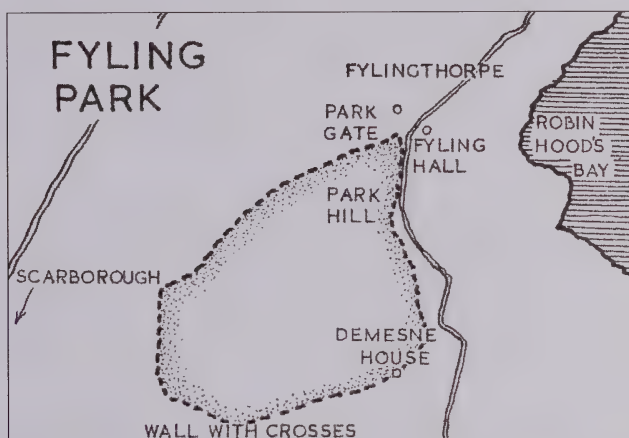


Figure 2 Outline of Fyling Park as shown by Rimington in 1974

The highest part of the deer park lies in the south-west corner, and from here there are good views over the rest of the enclosed area (see the photo on the back cover of this journal).

The deer park wall

As previously noted, the southern side of the former deer park is still marked by a substantial wall, broadly on an east-west alignment. It is of drystone construction, utilising squared blocks of gritstone, with a rubble core infill, and is of a different form and height from the other drystone field walls of the area. More specifically, the wall incorporates large stone crosses, placed at about 15m intervals (see Figure 3). In the following text, the north and south sides of the crosses are identified by the letters N and S (for example, cross 34N). A second north-south section of standing wall running from the south-west corner of the park

also contains crosses, but many of these have been disturbed or altered following rebuilding, and it is not known whether there were or are any more remaining in any other lengths of the deer park boundary.

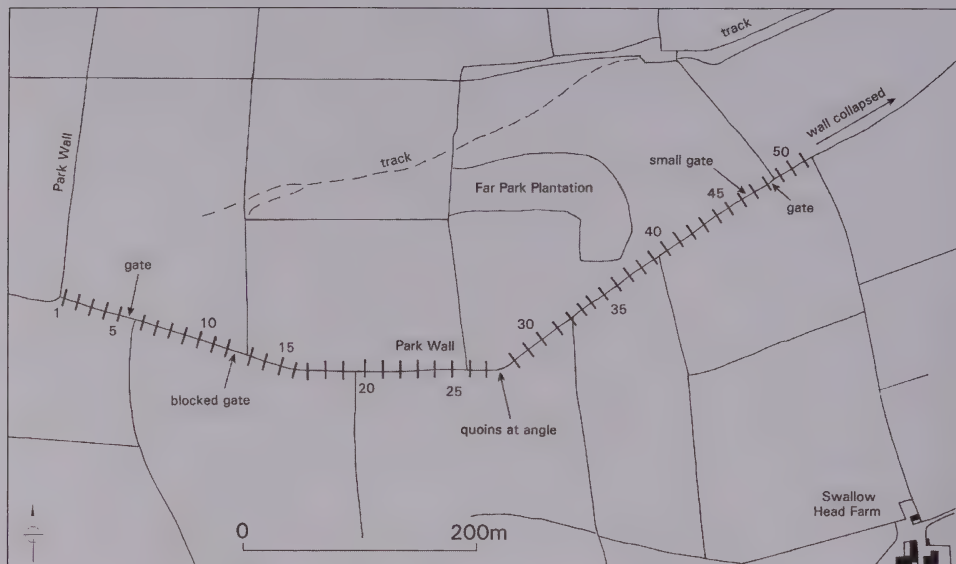


Figure 3 Distribution of crosses in the southern boundary of the former deer park

As far as can be determined, previous accounts and records deal only with the southern section of the park wall – the part containing the stone crosses. Atkinson reported in 1898 that the crosses were a constructional device to maintain the stability of the drystone wall, rather than having any religious symbolism. He also noted that the wall had been reduced in height by about 2ft (0.6m), to supply material for other more recent walls in the area.²⁴ Atkinson's account is additionally useful in that he published a photograph of the one of the crosses which, despite some later rebuilding, can still be recognised today as cross 28S (see Figure 4).

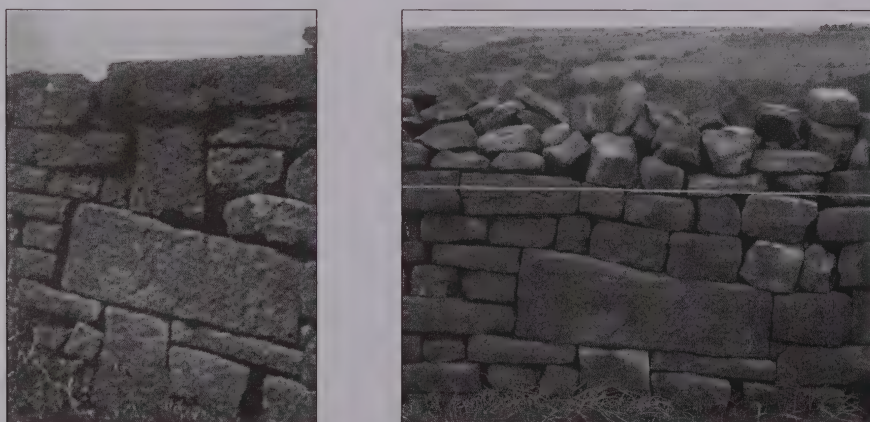


Figure 4 Cross 28S left: Atkinson's 1898 photograph, and right: 2016 photograph

In 1974, Rimington recorded the wall, known locally as the 'Buck Park Fence', in some detail, as part of his important collection of papers on deer parks in north-east Yorkshire. He noted that it stood for a considerable distance to a height of 4-5ft (1.2-1.5m) with a width of 2½-3ft (0.7-0.9m), that the crosses were placed about every 50ft (15.2m) apart, and that they were composed of up to six stones much larger and better dressed than their neighbours. The stones were more or less the same size, typically 36-40 inches long (0.91-1.01m), 12-15 inches high (0.30-0.38m) and 16-18 inches deep (0.40-0.45m). Two stones were laid along each face at the bottom of the wall to form a base, with a single 'through' stone on top (see Figure 5). The sequence was then repeated, with the top or upper 'through' generally coinciding with the top of the wall, although it is possible that there were normal walling courses above this. He recorded that about thirty or so crosses survived 'more or less complete', and that there were fragments of others visible in subsequent rebuilds. Finally, he noted that there was a ditch lying on the inner side of the pale, although some sections had been infilled, and that the wall was built on a bank up to 3ft (1.0m) high.²⁵

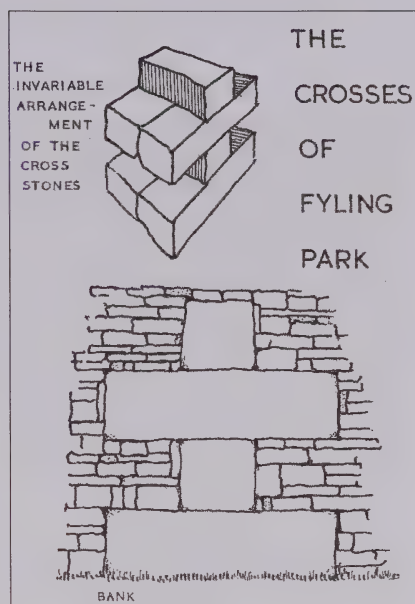


Figure 5 Details of a typical cross drawn by Rimington in 1974

More recently, in 1991, the NYMNPA carried out a detailed photographic survey of the wall, and this proved useful in determining areas of pre- and post-1991 repair and rebuilding.

Results of the archaeological survey

The construction of the deer park wall

The gritstone blocks forming the main fabric of the wall are generally well coursed, except where there has been previous repair or rebuilding, and indeed this provides evidence for earlier interventions. It was previously thought that significant portions of the wall appeared to be undisturbed medieval fabric, retaining the original courses and many of the stone crosses, but the waller undertaking the repair work thought that about 60 to 70 per cent of the alignment had been altered or rebuilt.²⁶ A comparison with the 1991 photographic record and the EDAS survey results suggests that this percentage may have been even higher. Nevertheless, some potentially original or earlier sections were identified, for example to the east of cross 7N, between crosses 24N and 25N (see Figure 6), around crosses 30N and 37N, west of cross 39N, and between crosses 47N and 48N.

A drystone wall is traditionally built with two sides of facing stone and a rubble core or 'hearting'. The facing stones would normally be tied together using 'throughs' passing through the thickness of the wall to increase stability.²⁷ As noted above, in 1898 Atkinson was of the opinion that the crosses performed this function, and this is certainly true, and there is generally little evidence for other throughs in the surviving wall. It would also be

expected that the wall would have had battered sides, especially the higher northern side where it revets the ground to the south, but this was evident only occasionally, and it seems that this was not an important feature of this wall's construction or of any later alteration.



Figure 6 A section of the deer park wall between crosses 24N and 25N

The wall tops are typically 0.7-0.8m wide and the bases only slightly wider, up to 1.0m wide. Despite some varying condition, the heights of each side of the wall are generally very uniform, with the south side being between 0.8-1.0m high and the north side (inside the deer park where the ground surface was lower) typically 1.2-1.4m high. In general terms, the wall is lowest in the western part where the ground surface is level, compared to the sloping ground (from cross 32 eastwards) where it is higher, especially on the northern side, before assuming a typically lower height on the flatter ground at the east end. Beyond cross 49, at the east end of the standing alignment, the partially collapsed wall is less than 1.0m high, although some sections were higher than this in 1991. It is also possible that this eastern end, which shows little sign of any rebuilding or repair, also represents part of the original construction. It is generally believed that the wall was originally higher, with the upper courses or any capping stones having been removed to expose the rubble core. This was commented on by Atkinson, who believed that 2ft or more (0.6m or more) of wall top courses had been taken for use in adjacent walls.²⁸

Several authors have previously mentioned that the wall stood on a bank, with an internal ditch on the inside of the park – on the north side, as would be expected with a deer park boundary. Rimington states that the bank was up to 3ft (0.9m) high while the ditch was clear enough although it was mostly infilled.²⁹ Today, however, the bank is only visible along the north side of the wall, and it probably represents one side of the aforementioned but now-silted-up ditch. Towards the west end of the wall, at cross 2N, the bank measures 0.7m high and 1.3m wide while further to the east (at cross 10N) it is 0.5m high. On the downslope section of the alignment, the bank is more pronounced, being 0.75-1.0m high and 1.2-1.5m wide. Along virtually the whole alignment, the ground on the south side of the wall is

significantly higher than that on the north, from a difference of 0.9m between ground levels at the west end, to 0.7m in the centre, and 1.4m towards the east end.

The well-preserved section of the deer park wall is actually composed of three straight angled sections (see Figure 3). The western change of angle was not especially visible in the field (about 15 degrees), but the eastern angle is much more prominent (about 40 degrees). The south side of the wall at this latter point is marked by three surviving courses of overlapping quoins expertly chamfered to match the angle. On the internal (north) side of the wall, this change of angle is marked by a straight joint, which may or may not have been original.

A small number of items of wall furniture were identified along the alignment, including two possible blocked step stiles and two possible narrow blocked openings; a similar opening, 1.5m wide and with a wooden gate, adjacent to cross 46 towards the east end of the wall, was walled up as part of the repair works (see Figure 7).



Figure 7 Cross 46S and wooden gate (October 2016)

None of these openings coincides with any footpaths or other routes shown on the historic maps. There was also a blocked gate to the east of cross 12, which had been open in 1991, and the footings of the wall had originally been removed to create this gateway. Finally, it was noted that all of the adjoining field walls butted up to the deer park wall, showing that it was earlier in date; in fact, the south side of cross 32 was actually hidden by the field wall joining from the south.

The source of the stone to build the deer park wall is not known. However, there is a large quarry in Far Park Plantation just to the north of the alignment, with exposed rock faces up to 3m high. Although there is no evidence to suggest the date at which this quarry was worked, it is not named on the nineteenth century Ordnance Survey maps, in contrast to others in the area, which might suggest that it is of some antiquity.

The crosses

The precise number of stone crosses along the surveyed length of deer park wall, or along the rest of the deer park boundary as a whole, is not known with certainty. Atkinson suggests that, in the southern section, they were placed every seven yards apart (6.4m), while Rimington notes that ‘some 30 survive more or less complete and there are fragments of many others where the wall has been rebuilt ...’, and that they lay about 50ft (15.2m) apart.³⁰ The remains of fifty-one crosses were identified by the EDAS survey, in varying states of completeness (see Figure 3), and the fact that they are almost exactly 15m apart helps with identification. Atkinson’s suggestion must be incorrect – this would double the number of crosses, and evidence for more would surely have been seen by the current survey.

The difference in height between the ground surface on either side of the wall means that not all elements of the same cross are visible on both sides. In many cases, the lower lintels and lower throughs are hidden on the south side (see Figure 8), but are evident on the higher north side. Despite Rimington’s sketch (see Figure 5), the lintels are frequently of different sizes, and the throughs vary from almost square in section to long and thin. Of course, it could be that the smaller sized or off-square examples are later replacements of original stones, and there are a number of large stones, resembling throughs and lintels, lying adjacent to parts of the north side of the wall. The upper lintel on cross 27N looks more like a former gate post (see Figure 9). The 2016–17 repair works concentrated on the wall rather than the crosses, although rebuilding work at cross 18 allowed the massive lower through to be seen in its entirety (see Figure 10).



Figure 8 Cross 22S,
with lower lintel hidden below ground level
(October 2016)



Figure 9 Cross 27N,
with possible gate post reused
as the upper lintel (April 2017)



Figure 10 Cross 18,
repairs in progress, showing massive
lower through (April 2017)

Four of the better-preserved crosses were measured and drawn as part of the EDAS survey, (see Figure 11). All had all four elements – lower lintel (1), lower through (2), upper lintel (3) and upper through (4) – surviving on the recorded face, and their relative sizes were measured, as shown in Table 1.

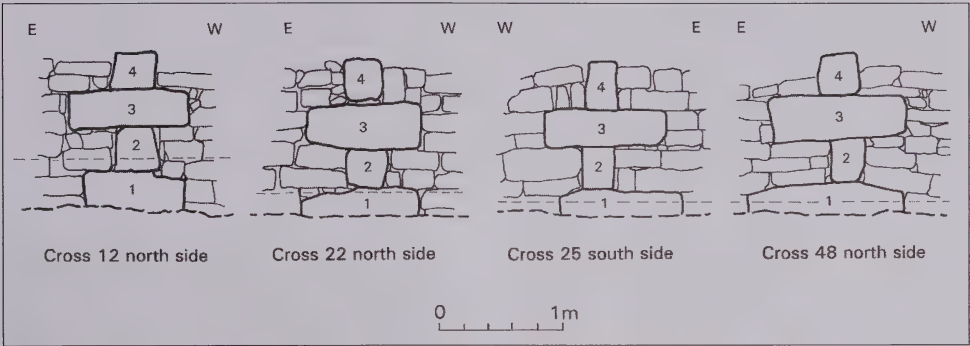


Figure 11 Four of the better-reserved crosses, surveyed in April 2017: the dashed line shows the ground level on the other side of the cross

	<i>Lower lintel</i>	<i>Lower through</i>	<i>Upper lintel</i>	<i>Upper through</i>
12N	0.82m L x 0.33m H	0.35m L x 0.40m H x 0.74m D	0.99m L x 0.33m H	0.33m L x 0.30m H x 0.74m D
22N	0.97m L x 0.30m H	0.34m L x 0.35m H x 0.75m D	0.90m L x 0.35m H	0.30m L x 0.37m H x 0.75m D
25S	1.00m L x 0.27m H	0.27m L x 0.40m H x 0.76m D	0.97m L x 0.30m H	0.25m L x 0.40m H x 0.76m D
48N	1.30m L x 0.30m H	0.30m L x 0.41m H x 0.72m D	1.12m L x 0.38m H	0.34m L x 0.35m H x 0.72m D

Table 1 Measurements of the elements of the crosses (L = long; H = high; D = deep through the wall)

Although by no means uniform in terms of size and shape, the cross stones are generally well tooled, with tooling marks evident in some cases. Crosses 15S and 23N exhibit eighteenth to nineteenth century diagonal tooling marks, and several crosses have small stones acting as packing to level up the large lintels and throughs; these are probably signs of later replacements. Plug and feather marks, indicating where the stone had been split from larger pieces, can also be seen on some crosses.

Marks or other carvings were seen on only three of the fifty-one identified crosses. The name ‘E DAMON’ was carved on the exposed face of the upper through of cross 22S, while on the other side, the exposed face of the upper lintel may have had ‘V W’, although this might also have been a misreading or differential erosion. Finally, the upper through of cross 48S has a small cross carved into it.

Discussion

The previous accounts suggest that Fyling deer park was established and owned by the Abbots of Whitby, and that it was probably laid out in the twelfth century, although there appear to be no known records relating to the park before the fourteenth century. After the Dissolution, the park passed to Sir Richard Cholmley of Roxby Castle, and he continued to use it, rebuilding or extending the former abbey hunting lodge (Fyling Hall, now Fyling Old Hall Farm) in 1629. The park then became neglected in favour of a new residence and park at Whitby, and it was confirmed as being ‘dissolved’ in a sale of 1634 to Sir John Hotham of Beverley. The park then seems to have been broken up and given over to agriculture by the late seventeenth century, by successive generations of the Hotham family.

Most of the deer park wall alignment is shown on mid nineteenth century Ordnance Survey maps, but little of the boundary appears to survive now, apart from the southern part of the west side and most of the south side. Despite these parts being protected as a Scheduled Monument, the western section has recently been rebuilt and much of its historic character has been lost. In terms of the surveyed southern part, it is difficult to see how much original medieval fabric remains, as there would have been numerous phases of rebuilding and repair over time, both during and after the lifetime of the park, and gateways and other openings have been created through the previously robust and intact boundary. There have also been several phases of more recent rebuilding work, both before and after 1991, and much of the 2016-17 work involved rebuilding collapsing modern repairs. Little of the ditch on the inside of the wall remains, but the north face of the wall is built on a bank.

The unique feature of the remaining sections of the deer park wall is the stone crosses, placed about every 15m along the alignment. It is not known whether these crosses originally extended around the full perimeter of the park, but this might be implied, given that they are present in all the surviving upstanding wall sections. The fact that the throughs and lintels form a cross shape (or more accurately a cross with a base support) has led to suggestions that they reflect the former monastic ownership of the park. While this may well be true, it is also certainly the case that the crosses act as a support to the drystone wall, binding the two faces together in the traditional manner. There appear to be relatively few other throughs, and even the highest surviving sections of wall (now about 1.3m high) do not have any batters or other supporting features. The wall would probably originally have been higher, as several courses have been removed from the top to provide stone for newer field boundaries. It seems quite likely therefore that the crosses served a dual purpose of providing structural stability as well as being an indication of ownership.

The size and weight of many of the cross elements are such that a considerable amount of labour would have been needed for both their creation and construction. If the crosses are seen as being original to the wall, they would probably have been put in place first, perhaps by specialist masons, and the intermediate sections of drystone wall added later. There is also a considerable difference in ground level between either side of the wall, with that on the north side (inside the park) being between 0.7-1.4m lower than that to the south. This means that many of the lower lintels and some of the lower throughs are hidden from view on the south side of the wall. It is assumed that they are present, in which case the ground would have been excavated to create a lynchet into which the lower lintels could be placed. This may be significant, in that the stones would have more of a cross-like appearance from the south (outside the park) without their lower supporting lintel being visible (see Figure 8).

Only twenty-seven sides of the fifty-one identified crosses were complete (26 per cent), with all four elements still visible and intact, although – as noted above – many lower lintels on the south side are buried. Of these, the best examples are considered to be crosses 22N/S, 27N/S, 30N, 31N and 35N (see Figures 8, 12 and 13). Of the lower elements of the crosses (the lower lintels and lower throughs), about 63 per cent and 83 per cent respectively survive, the difference in these percentages again reflecting the fact that the lower lintels were generally not visible on the south side of the wall. As might be expected, the greatest losses are to the upper lintels and upper throughs (57 per cent and 40 per cent respectively surviving). This reflects the rebuilding of the upper courses of the wall through time, but especially after 1991 when many upper throughs appear to have been removed; a few of the crosses were also repaired or reconstructed as part of the current phase of work.



Figure 12 Cross 22N (October 2016)



Figure 13 Cross 27S (April 2017)

It has always been assumed that the crosses are medieval or late medieval in date, but the presence of eighteenth to nineteenth century tooling on some of the elements might suggest that this need not necessarily be the case. Indeed, the very regular and intact appearance of some of the crosses, for example crosses 22N/S, 25N/S and 27N/S, might imply they are nineteenth century rebuilds. This in turn raises the question of why later non-monastic landowners retained and/or repaired the crosses – perhaps in deference to their earlier origins, but also presumably because they represented the best method of keeping the wall intact and upright.

Notes

- 1 E. Dennison (2018), *Fyling Deer Park Wall, Fylingdales, North Yorkshire: Archaeological Recording and Monitoring of 2016-17 Repairs*, unpublished EDAS archive report 2016/527.R01. The work was requested by the owners of Swallow Head Farm, and was funded by Historic England and the NYMNP
- 2 Ordnance Survey 6-inch maps of 1853, sheet 46 surveyed 1848-49 and sheet 47 surveyed 1849
- 3 F.C. Rimington (1974), 'The Early Deer Parks of North-East Yorkshire: Part II The Catalogue (continued)', *Transactions of the Scarborough and District Archaeological Society No. 17*, 5-11, pp. 9-10
- 4 National Heritage List for England 1015542, first scheduled on 7 April 1997
- 5 E. Dennison (2005), 'Parks in the Middle Ages', in E. Dennison (ed), *Within the Pale: The Story of Sheriff Hutton Park*, York, William Sessions Ltd, pp. 23-9
- 6 *Ibid.*
- 7 Rimington, *op. cit.*, p. 9

- 8 *Ibid.*
- 9 A. Russell (1923), 'Fylingdales', in W. Page (ed), *Victoria County History: North Yorkshire*, vol 2, London, St Catherine Press, p. 534; L. Cantor (1983), *The Medieval Parks of England: a Gazetteer*, Loughborough, Department of Education, Loughborough University, p. 88
- 10 J. C. Atkinson (1898), 'An Ancient Wall at Fylingdales, near Whitby', *The Reliquary and Illustrated Archaeologist*, July 1898, pp. 197-8
- 11 Rimington, *op. cit.*, p. 9
- 12 Russell, *op. cit.*, p. 503
- 13 J. Binns (2008), *Sir Hugh Cholmley of Whitby 1600-1657: Ancestry, Life and Legacy*, Pickering, Blackthorn Press, p. 3
- 14 *Ibid.*, p. 35
- 15 RCHME (Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England) (1987), *Houses of the North York Moors*, London, HMSO, pp. 32-4
- 16 L. Charlton (1779), *The History of Whitby and of Whitby Abbey*, York, London and Whitby, p. 326
- 17 N. Copsey, B. Gourley and M. Wilson (2012), *Swallowhead Farm, Fylingdales, North Yorkshire* (unpublished Management Plan produced by The Earth Stone and Lime Company), unpaginated
- 18 Cantor, *op. cit.*, p. 3
- 19 Hull History Centre U DDHO 53/4, reproduced and transcribed by Copsey *et al.*, *op. cit.*
- 20 Charlton, *op. cit.*, pp. 326-7
- 21 Copsey *et al.*, *op. cit.*
- 22 *Ibid.*
- 23 Ordnance Survey 6-inch maps of 1853, Yorkshire sheets 46 and 47; Ordnance Survey 25-inch maps of 1893, Yorkshire sheets 46/5, 46/8, 46/9 and 46/12
- 24 Atkinson, *op. cit.*
- 25 Rimington, *op. cit.*, pp. 10-11
- 26 Donald Gunn, personal comment
- 27 For example, A. Radford (2001), *A Guide to Dry Stone Walling*, Marlborough, Crowood Press; L. Garner (1999), *Dry Stone Walls*, Buckinghamshire, Shire Publications; DSWAGB (Dry Stone Walling Association of Great Britain) (1998), *Better Dry Stone Walling*, Milnthorpe, Dry Stone Walling Association of Great Britain; W. R. Mitchell (1992), *Drystone Walls of the Yorkshire Dales*, Giggleswick, Castleberg
- 28 Atkinson, *op. cit.*, p. 198
- 29 Rimington, *op. cit.*, pp. 10-11
- 30 Atkinson, *op. cit.*; Rimington, *op. cit.*, p. 10

The serpent in Ryedale

Margaret Allison

Introduction

The image of the serpent frequently appears on the stone sculpture of the Anglo-Scandinavian period in our churches in Ryedale. It can be seen from Ellerburn, Levisham and Middleton, to Sinnington, Lasingham, Kirkdale and Hovingham. Why does it appear so often? What did the serpent mean to people in Anglo-Scandinavian times? Why is it so significant an image? The following article will aim to explore the written and sculptural evidence relating to the serpent at different periods in its history and will hope to throw some light on this difficult and puzzling subject.

My interest in the serpent was especially engaged about thirty years ago during a church service, firstly by the gospel reading and then by its interpretation. The gospel from St John 3:14 read 'The son of Man must be lifted up as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert.' This was followed by the priest's interpretation that in the same way as Moses raised the serpent in the desert, let us raise the Eucharist.

What is the origin of this statement? Is the serpent good or evil? It is probable that different cultures used the symbolism of the serpent to suit the time and place, as the meaning of words can be subtly altered. The serpent is a theme that recurs from earliest times. I would like to look at some examples of its occurrence in our western culture.

The Early Bronze Age

One of the earliest sources to use the image of the serpent comes from the story of Gilgamesh, an epic poem which dates from the early Bronze Age, c.2000-2500 BC. Gilgamesh was the king of Uruk or Erech (now Iraq). His great quest was for immortality. He searches in the depth of the sea for the secret herb which can give the gift of eternal youth. Although he succeeds in finding it, he then carelessly leaves it on the ground where it is eaten by a snake. And so the snake can slough off its old skin and be young again. Gilgamesh laments: '...was it for this that I toiled with my hands, is it for this I have wrung out my heart's blood? For myself I have gained nothing; not I, but the beast of the earth has joy of it now.'¹

Here already is one legendary role of the serpent. The serpent achieves immortality and man does not. We do not know how much older still is the myth of the serpent before it was enshrined in the epic poem of an heroic king of the Bronze Age. The story of Gilgamesh demonstrates that we are dealing with a symbol rooted in pre-history and that it is its very antiquity that makes it so difficult to understand.

In the Bible

The serpent appears in the first pages of the Bible in Genesis 3:1-6 when it invites Eve to eat of the tree of knowledge. The serpent is duly cursed as evil for its role in the fall of man. However, shortly after the role of the serpent changes. In Exodus 4:1-4 the rod in Moses' hand becomes a serpent and when it is transformed back into the rod, it becomes the symbol of Moses' power. Later the rod will evolve and become the sceptre or crozier, often seen with a serpent on it, and representing the authority of state or church. Then in Numbers 21:8-9 Moses is told: 'Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole ... every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live.' The power of the rod or pole or sceptre is rooted in the serpent.

James Fenton gives a stunning example of the use of the serpent in the enormous altarpiece made by Cristóbal de Villalpando in 1683 in Mexico. The altarpiece is divided in two: the lower half, which depicts Moses and the Brazen Serpent, shows a huge snake with wings coiled around a cross-like standard, while the upper half depicts the Transfiguration of Christ. Fenton comments, 'The brazen serpent in the lower register is thus the prefigured Christ of the upper register.'² It is interesting to note that the brazen (brass, bronze) serpent harkens back to the Bronze Age and that such an object, made with the precious metal of that age, would be a greatly revered and valued relic. Here is a different view of the serpent; it is one of power and glory. The view is probably based on earlier cultures and their beliefs.

Thus in its earliest period the Bible is ambiguous in its portrayal of the serpent. On the one hand, the serpent is evil. This may be because in Genesis the Bible is countering those earlier beliefs in the power and healing of the serpent. It is necessary for the Bible to establish its own beliefs and to discredit and vilify earlier ones. On the other hand, in Exodus and Numbers the Bible accepts that the serpent is a great benefit: it is the sceptre and the crozier. It may be that the Bible is now incorporating the earlier beliefs that have persisted in society from previous cultures. In a similar way early Christianity tolerated earlier pagan beliefs, assimilating into the new religion holy wells, temple sites and the use of the same dates for celebrating religious festivals.

The classical world

An important theme in early Greek culture was the motif of the serpent eating its tail, known as 'ouroboros' (oura = tail, boros = eating). Ouroboros is a symbol of the eternal. The search for the eternal has been a constant quest of man in all ages, man seeking the everlasting in all cultures from the Neolithic tombs to the pyramids through to all modern religions. One of the earliest surviving images of the serpent eating its tail is from the pre-Classical period, in the fourteenth-century BC tomb of Tutankhamun.

Why this symbol? Why is the serpent eating its tail? What is so special about the serpent that it is given the all-powerful symbolism of everlasting life? It is the serpent's ability to shed its skin and so to renew itself. In ouroboros the serpent is not literally eating its tail; it is depicting a continuum, the eternal return, a force that cannot be extinguished.

The serpent theme informs much of Greek culture in myth and in decoration. Outstanding is the serpent/dragon at Pytho.³ Legend has it that the oracle there originally belonged to the Earth goddess, and was guarded by her child Python, the serpent. Apollo slew Python and founded his own oracle there – perhaps another example of the need to destroy an earlier belief. Pytho is then renamed and becomes Delphi, the holiest site in the ancient Greek world. Once again an earlier religion is thus transformed, this time into a new Greek one. So the serpent is part of Greek mythology, another indication of how early its origins must have been.

Apollo's son is Asclepius, the Greek god of medicine. It is his staff that is today's medical symbol, the serpent climbing up the rod (see Figure 1). The serpent on the rod is a variation of the serpent on a pole in the Bible. Both illustrate how rooted in antiquity is the symbol of the serpent on the staff. It represents healing, renewal and rebirth.



Figure 1
Today's medical
symbol

It is a belief that continues into Roman times. In *Metamorphoses* Ovid describes the distress of Rome and ‘the deaths that were wiping out the Italian race’. The city is saved by the visit of Asclepius who says: ‘only look at this serpent that twines around my staff... For I shall disguise myself as my serpent... Now the serpent-god had entered the Roman city, the mighty capital ... and put an end to the citizens’ distress, and brought health to the city by his coming.’⁴

The serpent/dragon in Ryedale

As noted in the introduction, the serpent/dragon theme plays a large role in the Anglo-Scandinavian period in Ryedale. It features in both sculpture and folklore. The serpent, worm or dragon have become interchangeable terms, the dragon being a more elaborate version. In Norse myths the World Serpent surrounds the earth and is coiled round the Yggdrasil tree, a green ash, the tree of life. It bites its own tail. There are traces here of early roots: from the Bible and the tree of knowledge in the Garden of Eden, from the Egyptian tomb of Tutankhamun, and from Greek culture with the continuum and eternal return of ouroboros. In one of the famous stories from the myths, Thor attempts first to catch the World Serpent but, although he chops it, it escapes.⁵ Then at Ragnarök (the end of the world), Thor slays the World Serpent but dies himself from its poison. These two themes of the chopped serpent/dragon and of the poisoned death of the hero recur in the many versions of the serpent/dragon myths and we will return to them in our local Nunnington tale.

In sculpture

The basis for this section is drawn from the stunning website of James Lang’s monumental *Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture, Vol. III, York and Eastern Yorkshire*, 1991.⁶ The volume also includes the churches in Ryedale. In fact the majority of the examples of dragons/serpents that are cited in the volume occur in Ryedale. Why so many in Ryedale? Matthew Townend writes that in comparison with the Anglo-Saxon period when stone sculpture was ‘the preserve of major ecclesiastical centres’, there was a great increase in sculpture in the Viking period, when it became more secular. Townend then cites the example of the Middleton Cross from the Viking Age: ‘the new function of sculpture was usually secular and funerary: grave monuments to the new elite.’⁷ The new Scandinavian elite in our Ryedale villages commissioned very expensive stone crosses as their funerary monuments. It can only be speculation that the serpent/dragon theme was of special interest to them and their sculptors, who were perhaps wishing to hold on to their Scandinavian traditions.

There are about 13 churches in the Ryedale area with dragon/serpent sculptures. These are mostly tenth century and occur on cross shafts (pillars or columns), although some do occur on cross heads. Since they are often not easy to see or decipher, a preliminary study of Lang’s website is recommended before visiting them. The churches in Middleton, Lastingham and Sinnington all have very good examples (see Figures 2, 3 and 4).

Figure 2 shows a tenth-century cross shaft in the north aisle of Middleton Church. Lang describes it as ‘a solitary profile ribbon beast, clumsily executed in an undulating posture.’⁸ The cross is well worth a visit because its excellent state of preservation in a well-lit display makes it an accessible and dramatic example.

Figure 3 shows a tenth-century cross shaft in the crypt of Lastingham Church. Lang writes about it: ‘a pair of snakes ... their undulating, tapering bodies interlacing in a simple twist’,

and he suggests that there is ‘a raised cruciform element’.⁹ Is this also an echo of the brazen serpent raised in the desert?



Figure 2 Cross shaft with dragon/serpent at St Andrew's, Middleton



Figure 3 Cross shaft from St Mary's, Lastingham¹⁰



Figure 4 Dragon sculpture from All Saints' Church, Sinnington

The dragon sculpture in Sinnington (see Figure 4) is part of a tenth-century cross-shaft and is built into the eastern splay of a window in the south wall of the nave inside All Saints' Church. Lang describes it as ‘probably the finest and most decorative of the Ryedale bound dragons ... The ultimate origin is pre-Viking Mercian animal ornament.’ He goes on to say that ‘the entangling trails have a long Insular ancestry, going back to Hiberno-Saxon decoration of manuscripts and sculpture’ and that a Lindisfarne sculpture ‘provides a very early prototype for the Sinnington creature, as do many pages of the Lindisfarne Gospels.’¹¹



Figure 5 Grave cover from St John's, Levisham¹²

A tenth-century grave-cover (see Figure 5) originally in Levisham Church is now in Ryedale Folk Museum at Hutton-le-Hole, where it has been adopted as the museum's logo. Lang gives the following description: 'A solitary undulating profile beast ... [a] ribbon body ... fettered ... The largest fetter is a snake ... whose tail is bitten by the beast's fangs'.¹³ Cramp explains 'fettered' as [an animal] 'entwined by strand which is not an extension of itself'.¹⁴ The tail being eaten is an echo of ouroboros, the symbol of the eternal.

There are more than 29 of these sculptures in our Ryedale churches. About 75 per cent of these are referred to as 'bound dragons/ribbon beasts' which are fettered and the rest are serpents which are not fettered. It is interesting to speculate why there is this distinction. The following is one such speculation. The serpent is a symbol from an earlier period and still follows closely its original meaning, signifying renewal and rebirth; but it might then be – following on from this – that the bound dragon/ribbon beast is a further evolution of the symbol in which its power has been contained and subdued by the fettering. Perhaps the earlier Church had tolerated the beliefs embodied in the unfettered serpent, but the later Church no longer did and so the serpent became bound. As Christianity became more confident and established, it could gradually phase out earlier beliefs.

In folklore

The serpent or worm legends are part of the death and regeneration theme that pervades religious beliefs. The old year dies in winter, threatening starvation, disease and death. Spring brings regeneration and life. It is significant that St George's Day is 23 April and linked to the celebration of the fertility of crops and new growth. There are many versions of the tales of St George killing the dragon. Mrs Jameson tells us in her account of St George of Cappadocia (central Turkey) that the tales came from the East in the fourth century and she likens them to Apollo and the Python.¹⁵ In a mummers' play performed at the Ryedale Folk Museum in the 1990s, St George kills the Turk, who is restored to life at the end of the play: it is a tale of death and resurrection.¹⁶

In the north-east a famous legend is the Sockburn Worm and there is also the worm which plagued Newcastle. More locally there is the worm plaguing Slingsby mentioned in Dodsworth in about 1600.¹⁷ According to legend, a great serpent was preying upon travellers on the Malton road and had its lair near Slingsby. The serpent was killed by the noble knight, Wyvill of Slingsby, who in turn 'received his death wound' from the serpent.

Eastmead in 1824 gives a fulsome account of the Nunnington Worm.¹⁸ He writes that in Nunnington Church there is a tomb effigy of a knight, cross-legged, whose name is said to be Peter Loschy of Loschy Hill, at nearby East Newton. A huge serpent terrorised the neighbourhood and Peter Loschy undertook to slay it. He clothed himself in a surcoat, a coat of mail, covered with razor blades, and with his faithful dog set off. The huge monster 'termed a dragon' emerged from the thicket of Loschy Hill. It wrapped itself tightly around the body of the razor-clad Peter, and so fell to pieces on to the ground. The dog quickly took the pieces, one by one, to a field a mile away near Nunnington Church. 'The reason of this extraordinary proceeding ... is that this huge serpent had been frequently before cut in two, but had as frequently rejoined again.' The knight then went to rejoin his dog near the Church. The dog leapt up to lick his face, but its breath was impregnated with the serpent's poison. The knight fell dead and so now lies in Nunnington Church with his faithful dog at his feet. Eastmead then writes that the whole area of Cauklass, which runs from Ness to Nunnington to East Newton, had once been infested with serpents or hagworms and that 'a snake was found here only seven years ago [in 1817] measuring nearly six feet.' It is interesting to note

that in nature the earthworm has the ability to lose part of its body and yet live; this remarkable power would have been observed by early man.

Conclusion

It seems that in Ryedale the interpretation of what the serpent meant in the Anglo-Scandinavian era is reasonably clear: in the earlier period it was a symbol of the resurrection, but by the later period that is no longer the case. In the later medieval period, the worm/serpent had evolved so that it is chopped into bits and scattered over the land or thrown into a river to prevent it rejoining its parts. In earlier tales the serpent/dragon is brought back to life, but now great lengths are gone to in order to prevent this restoration. Is this part reversion to the serpent as evil, as seen in Genesis?

In a similar way the serpent/dragon of Anglo-Scandinavian sculpture is eventually bound or fettered and its power contained.

Thus by the Middle Ages there ended the many centuries of tolerating and incorporating the earlier belief in the power of the serpent. The thousands of years of the serpent as the symbol signifying rebirth and regeneration were ended.

Notes

- 1 N.K. Sanders (translator) (1960), *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, The Penguin Classics, London, Penguin Books, available at http://l-adam-mekler.com/epic_gilgamesh.pdf (accessed 20.6.19)
- 2 J. Fenton, 'Moses in Mexico', *The New York Review of Books*, 12 October 2017, 9 March 2006, pp. 12-13, reviewing *Cristóbal de Villalpando: Mexican Painter of the Baroque*
- 3 *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th Edition (1910-11), Vol. 22, Cambridge University Press, p. 704
- 4 Mary M. Innes (translator) (1955), Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, London: Penguin Classics, Book XV, pp. 382-5
- 5 H.R. Ellis Davidson (1964), *Gods and Myths of Northern Europe*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, p. 207. This theme is thought to be depicted on an early tenth-century sculpted slab [or frieze] known as the 'fishing stone' in St Mary's Church, Gosforth, Cumbria
- 6 See <http://www.ascorpus.ac.uk/catvol13.php>
- 7 M. Townend (2014), *Viking Age Yorkshire*, Pickering, Blackthorn Press, p. 131
- 8 J. Lang (ed) (1991), *Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture: York and Eastern Yorkshire*, Vol. III, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 181-2
- 9 *Ibid.*, p. 167
- 10 Drawing from W.G. Collingwood (1907), 'Anglian and Anglo-Danish Sculpture in the North Riding of Yorkshire', *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal* XIX, p. 356
- 11 Lang, *op. cit.*, pp. 208-9
- 12 Drawing from Collingwood, *op. cit.*, p. 361
- 13 Lang, *op. cit.*, p. 177-8
- 14 R. Cramp (1984), *Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Sculpture: County Durham and Northumberland*, Vol I, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. xlvii
- 15 Mrs Jameson (1890), *Sacred and Legendary Art*, Vol. II, London, Longmans, Green and Co., pp. 398-411
- 16 An almost identical account is given in J. Weston (1957), *From Ritual to Romance: An Account of the Holy Grail from Ancient Ritual to Christian Symbol*, New York, Doubleday, Doran and Company Ltd., pp. 94-6
- 17 Quoted in W. Eastmead (1824), *Historia Rievallensis*, Thirsk, R. Peat, p. 236
- 18 Eastmead, *op. cit.*, pp. 170-3

**A study of a tenancy agreement between John, Abbot of Byland Abbey,
and William Storer, 2 April 1534, for Old Byland,
and a review of the evidence identifying the location of Old Byland Grange**
Susan Harrison

The tenancy agreement

Found amongst a bundle of legal papers, this recently-discovered deed was transferred to English Heritage Trust collections from Louth Museum, Lincolnshire, in 2017 following conservation in 2015.

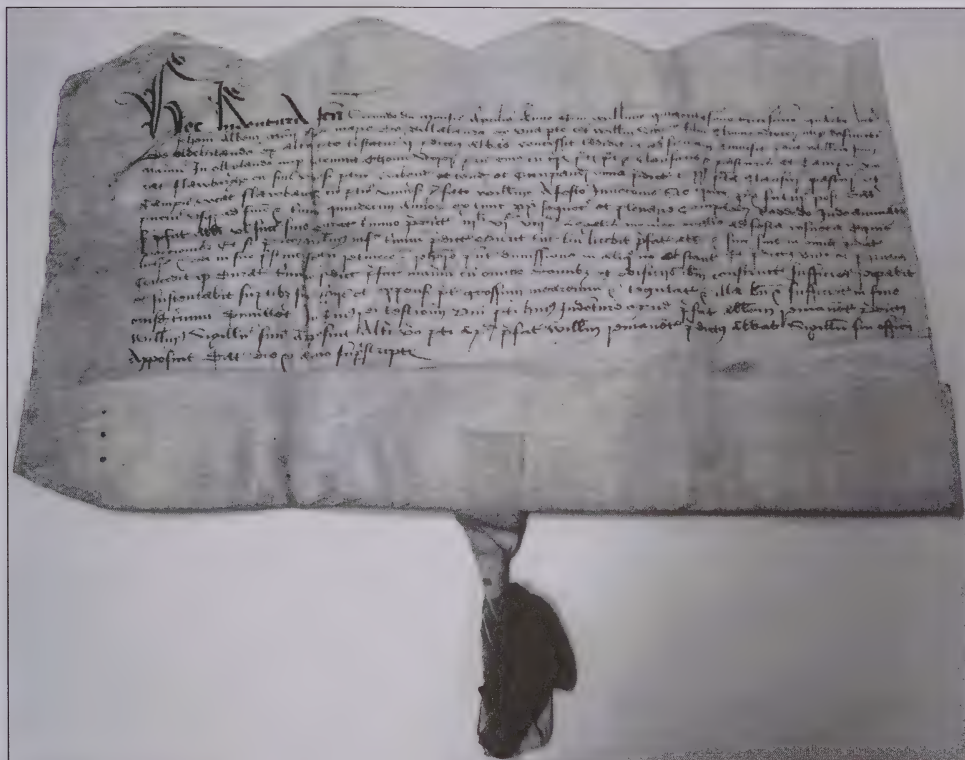


Figure 1 The tenancy agreement

The deed states:

‘This indenture made the second day of April, in the year of our Lord 1534, between John Abbot of the monastery of St Mary of Byland, on the one part and William Storer son of Thomas Storer lately deceased, of Old Byland, on the other part, witnesseth, that the said abbot hath granted, delivered, and to farm letter to the aforesaid William his manor in Old Byland lately in the tenure of Thomas Storer his father, with the lands meadows, and closes and pastures, and the plain called Flawbarghe, with all the appurtenances thereof, to have and to hold, and to occupy all the aforesaid lands, meadows, closes, pastures and the plain called Flawbarghe, with all the appurtenances thereof to the aforesaid William, from the feast of the

Invention of the holy Cross next after the date of these presents to the end and term of fifteen years, from thence here ensuing and to be fully completed, paying therefore yearly to the said abbot, and his successors, during the said term £3. 6. 8 of lawful money of England, at the usual feasts, by equal portions and if the aforesaid William shall happen to die, within the said term, then it shall be lawful for the said Abbot, and his successors into all the said premises to enter, and the same to repossess and have again in its former state, the said indenture of lease in any wise notwithstanding and the said William doth consent and by these presents, doth agree, that, during the said term, he will sufficiently repair and maintain the aforesaid manor, with all the houses and buildings erected thereupon, at his own proper costs and charges, except the main timber and roof and that he will give up the same in good and sufficient repair, at the end of the said term. In witness whereof the said William hath set his seal to one part of this indenture with the said Abbot, and to the other part remaining with the said William the said abbot hath set the seal of his office, the day and year above written.’¹

The indenture is a chirograph, written in two parts, one to be retained by Storer, the other by the abbey. This is Storer’s copy with the abbot’s seal attached. The parchment was cut in half with zigzag indents to prevent fraud and remind both parties about the terms of the lease and payment dates. It is written in Latin in an accomplished hand on a sheet of parchment made of sheep- or calf-skin using iron gall ink. The scribe has decorated the first three words *Hec Indentura facta*. The flourishes on the initial letter H include a bearded human head in profile, a dog with an upturned snout, and another profile human face with the flourish extending to a fish complete with fins, scales, a mouth and an eye in the margin.

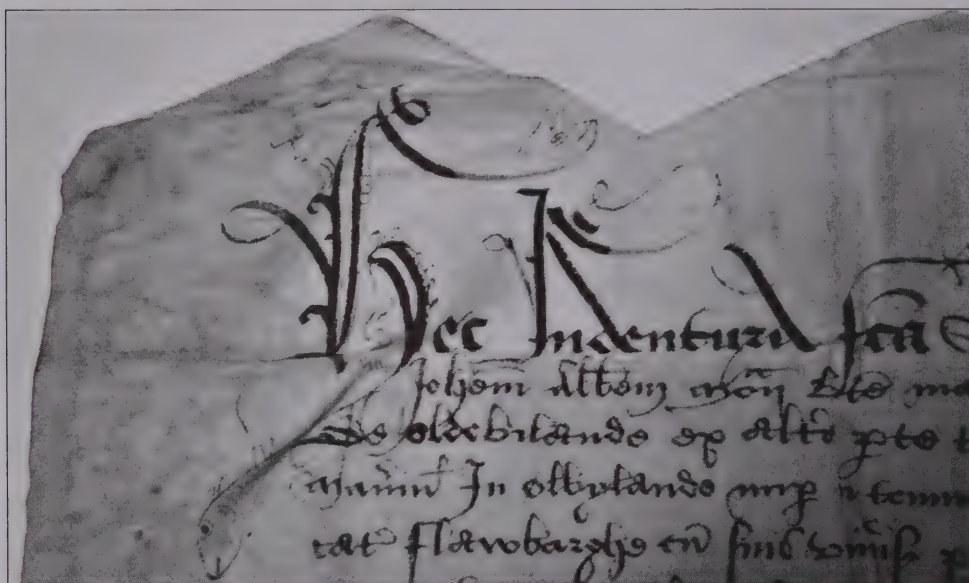


Figure 2 The decorations on the first three words

The abbot’s seal was attached using an additional strip of parchment, woven between two splices cut into the lower margin which has been folded and upturned. The wax seal was then applied to the tag. The remaining portion of the seal is of red wax and originally of vesical

(pointedly oval) form. Centrally there is a robed abbot holding a crosier in his proper right hand within an architectural canopy. To the right is a shield over the architecture bearing the royal arms. Only a few letters of the original legend are discernible on the remaining border.

The document has been folded in quarters width-wise and then thirds length-wise leaving a portion of outer ‘envelope’ visible. An inexperienced hand has written ‘The Abbotss deed 2d Apr’ with the first ‘s’ written over a second ‘t’. A later hand has written ‘2d April 1534. A lease of the Manor and Lands in Old Byland from John the Abbot of Byland to William Storer with a translation annexed’. There is a further inscription of ‘25th year’, possibly added to aid cataloguing, referring to the twenty-fifth year of King Henry VIII’s reign, and on the upper reverse margin is a ‘B’. The author of the translation added a note at the end of his work: ‘NB. The Abbots deed marked A is another lease to Tho. Storer the father of Wm Storer of the same lands and on the same terms.’ This indicates that the author had access to that deed at the time of making the translation.

Old Byland was originally one of the sites occupied by the monastic community who eventually settled at Byland Abbey from 1177. Gundreda de Gournay of Thirsk² granted the travelling Savigniac community of monks from Furness Abbey land on which to settle at Hood (later Hood Grange) in 1139. This proved unsuitable and so they moved, in 1142, to Old Byland³ which formed part of the original land grant from Gundreda. Settlement there led to conflict with nearby Rievaulx Abbey, a Cistercian community whose services times did not correspond with theirs. The bells from each community could be heard and were disruptive.⁴ This forced another move and by 1147 they settled at Stocking (Oldstead), during which time the entire Savigniac Order was merged with the Cistercian Order. Whilst they were at Stocking, work commenced on their final site of Byland Abbey.⁵ Old Byland became a grange under the control of Byland Abbey in 1147.⁶ Until the fourteenth century Byland Abbey had a large number of granges maintained by lay brothers. By the sixteenth century the monastery retained only 50 acres in closes around the monastery and the rest, including the granges, some of which were the former monastic sites, were let to lay farmers.

This deed was signed at a tumultuous time for monastic communities, but also clearly demonstrates that business was conducted as usual. In 1532 King Henry VIII commissioned John Alanbridge,⁷ abbot of Byland, to visit all Cistercian houses.⁸ In May 1533 one of Thomas Cromwell’s agents was at Byland collecting signatures to a manifesto to support the King, and in 1534 the community took the oath of Supremacy.⁹ Abbot Alanbridge and the Abbot of Fountains were used by Cromwell to depose Edward Kirkby Cowper, Abbot of Rievaulx on 15 October 1533.¹⁰ On 30 November 1538 Abbot John, the prior and 23 monks signed the deed of surrender. Byland and its former estates were granted to William Pickering¹¹ in 1540.¹²

The location of Old Byland Grange

The original site referred to in this tenancy agreement is probably that of Old Byland Grange. The exact location of Old Byland Grange has been subject to confusion over many years, but a review of the archives of this area of land throughout the sixteenth century and the early seventeenth century helps shed light on it. The *Victoria County History* summarises that Old Byland Grange was at one time called Storer’s Farm and ‘was granted in 1556 to Thomas Wood and John Brown. It was then in the tenure of William Storer and was probably alienated to him later, for he appears in possession of it until 1602, when he conveyed a certain message, presumably Old Byland Grange, and lands in Old Byland to William and Henry Bellasis.’¹³

This summary simplifies the evidence and is worth reviewing, since the evidence suggests that the land ownership was subject to transactions on no less than 11 occasions from the suppression to the early seventeenth century. The tenancy agreement confirms that in 1534 the tenant at Old Byland was William Storer whilst the owner was Byland Abbey. On later evidence, listed below, it can be assumed that Storer remained the tenant whilst the Crown took ownership following the suppression of Byland Abbey in 1538.

22 September 1540 Byland Abbey and its associated lands were sold to William Pickering.¹⁴

20 June 1557 the tenement or grange called Olde Byland and a parcel of land called Lambert Hagg¹⁵ with appurtenances was occupied by William Storer. It was owned by Thomas Wood and John Browne.¹⁶

28 June 1557 Old Byland Grange and one parcel of land called Lambert Hagg, and all appurtenances were occupied by William Storer. The owner was Brian Askwyth who sold it to William Storer.¹⁷

The adjoining parishes of Old Byland and Murton were subject to a contested lawsuit to establish ownership of 'common land' between the parishes in the late sixteenth century. In 1598 the rivals at law were Sir Edward Wotton and Sir William Bellasis. Sir Edward Wotton owned the greater part of Old Byland having inherited it from his father in law William Pickering. Land in Murton was owned by Sir William Bellasis who also owned an estate within Old Byland parish called Wethercotes (a former home farm of Byland Abbey). Bellasis was accused of taking over land between the parishes to bridge his two estates. This land was claimed by Wotton as being common land in Old Byland. The lawsuit was considered by the barons of the Court of the Exchequer who accepted jurisdiction because the lands had been former monastic lands. The judges received sworn depositions from witnesses who assembled at Byland Abbey on 24 August 1598. The evidence of nine witnesses has survived as well as the map drawn by Christopher Saxton, commissioned in July 1598, to make 'a perfect plot of the places and grounds mentioned in the pleadings' and it was to be 'at the equall charge of both the said parties'.¹⁸



Figure 3 Extract from Christopher Saxton's map of the Old Byland area, with 'old byland towne', 'oldbyland cote' and 'Mr Storie' clearly marked on it

29 October 1599 William Storer passed ownership to his son Thomas Storer¹⁹

11 November 1599 Thomas Storer sold to Ralph Westropp²⁰

12 November 1601 Ralph Westropp defaulted on his mortgage and ownership reverted to Thomas Storer²¹

14 November 1601 Old Byland Grange and Lambert Hagg were sold by Thomas Storer to John Harte. The tenant was Nathaniel Ferrer²²

11 June 1602 John Harte passed ownership to William Bellasys²³ and Henry Bellasys²⁴

9 October 1602 William Bellasys sold to William Storer, Thomas Storer, John Harte and his wife Anne²⁵

18 Nov 1602 Thomas Storer sold to John Hart²⁶

12 Feb 1603 it was owned by Henry Thorseby, Richard Staveley and William Bellasys and Henry Bellasys.²⁷ The vouchees were William Storer, Thomas Storer and Richard Humfrey.²⁸

According to the *Victoria County History*²⁹ Old Byland Grange was known as ‘Storer’s Farm’. This is corroborated by Exchequer papers,³⁰ with the associated mapping by Christopher Saxton in 1598 which marked land south of Old Byland village, now known as Old Byland Grange, as ‘Mr Storye’ with ‘Old Byland Cote’ marked at the site of the present Valley View Farm to the west of the village.

Swan and Wilson³¹ identified that the site of the grange at Old Byland is almost certainly represented by the earth works at Valley View Farm, despite the fact that the farm 250 metres to the south-west is currently called Old Byland Grange. On Ordnance Survey sheet Yorkshire 88, 1853-56, the present Old Byland Grange was marked as OverGill House, but on Ordnance Survey sheet Yorkshire LXXXVIII.NE, 1891-95, and subsequent Ordnance Survey maps as Old Byland Grange.

Swan and Wilson concluded that ‘the land now occupied by the present Valley View Farm and the probable site of the grange may well, therefore, have lain within Storer’s tenancy.’³² The tenancy agreement helps to corroborate this argument as it refers to meadows, closes, pastures and plains as well as ‘all the houses and buildings erected thereupon’.

Archaeological work by Hayes³³ in 1963, Buglass³⁴ in 2018 and survey work by Jecock and Oakley³⁵ in 2018 concur that the main nucleus of Old Byland Grange was actually immediately to the west and north-west of Valley View Farm at Old Byland. This site has now been recognised and scheduled as Old Byland monastic grange.³⁶ This is the site marked as ‘oldbyland cote’ by Saxton.

The term ‘grange’ is not used in either the tenancy agreement, the valuation, or Saxton’s map to refer to land at Old Byland. The Valuation of Byland Abbey in 1538³⁷ separately lists Old Bylandcote, worth £1 6s 8d and Old Bylande worth £14 15s 7d. Given that Storer was paying annual rent of £3 6s 8d in 1534 this implies that Old Bylande in the valuation refers to the wider grange site, rather than only Old Byland Cote (now Valley View Farm). By 1557 the land occupied and subsequently purchased by Storer is referred to as Old Byland Grange. Saxton’s map refers to the village as ‘old byland towne’, with ‘oldbyland cote’ immediately to the west of the village, and land south of the village is marked ‘Mr Storye’ (see Figure 3).

Conclusion

The tenancy agreement suggests that the land held by Storer was extensive and had a number of buildings on it. It seems reasonable to suppose that Old Byland Cote, now part of Valley View Farm, did comprise an element of the wider Old Byland Grange, as did the land now known as Old Byland Grange, and that Lambert Hagg and the village of Old Byland were within the original gift from Gundreda de Gournay to the Savigniac monks from Furness Abbey, later absorbed into the Cistercian Order, and became part of the Byland Abbey estate.³⁸ The survival of the number of resources for the parish of Old Byland in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is remarkable. They give a unique insight into the complexities of landholding and the political turmoil in the years following the suppression of the monasteries – possibly a typical pattern across many former monastic estates.

Notes

- 1 The original document is written in Latin. This translation is a transcription from a nineteenth-century handwritten translation, author unknown, written on trimmed watermarked paper, which accompanied the parchment in an envelope marked with an auction lot number
- 2 Mother of Roger de Mowbray d. 1188
- 3 Formerly Begeland, *Victoria County History*, 1923, <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/yorks/north/vol2/pp3-5> (accessed 12.08.19)
- 4 S.A. Harrison (1999), *Byland Abbey*, London, English Heritage, pp. 25-6
- 5 J. Burton (ed) (2004), *The Cartulary of Byland Abbey*, Surtees Society, Boydell Press, pp. lviii and 339
- 6 The *Historia Fundationis* states: 'While Abbot Roger and his monks held Byland they decided to reduce it to a grange. With these thoughts in mind they set aside a certain portion of land belonging to the vill for the men who remained there, that is at Stutekelde, where the men began a new village and there they remained for several years and gave it its new name. And so the vill was reduced to a grange', Burton, *op. cit.*, pp. lxxvii-lxxviii
- 7 Abbot John Alanbridge, alias Leeds. Various spellings are noted in the literature including Allnbridge, Alanebrigg and Ledes.
- 8 Also the abbots of Fountains, Woburn, St Mary Grace and Neath. H. Aveling (1955), 'The monks of Byland Abbey after the Dissolution', *Ampleforth Journal* 60, p. 6
- 9 C. Cross (1995), *Monks, Friars and Nuns in Sixteenth Century Yorkshire*, Yorkshire Archaeological Society, p. 100. The Oath of Supremacy required any person taking public or church office in England to swear allegiance to the monarch as Supreme Governor of the Church of England. Failure to do so was treated as treason
- 10 Aveling, *op. cit.*, p. 6
- 11 Sir William Pickering, lord of the manor of Oswaldkirk and Knight Marshall to King Henry VIII, purchased the former Byland Abbey lands for £8 5s 6d. M. Watson (2000), *Life and Times of Wass and Byland*, private publication
- 12 Burton, *op. cit.*, p. xxv
- 13 *Victoria County History*, 1923, *op. cit.* (accessed 12.08.19)
- 14 Burton, *op. cit.*, p. xxv
- 15 Lambert Hagg is an area of land in the east of the parish of Old Byland, adjoining the parish of Rievaulx
- 16 North Yorkshire County Record Office, ZDV (MIC 3644/197) Thomas Wood of London, MP 1558, and John Browne of York, MP for Aldborough 1558, d. 1570
- 17 North Yorkshire County Record Office, ZDV (MIC 3644/202). Richard Askwyth of Osgoodby, and Brian (d. 1589-90) his son who were also tenants of Byland Abbey. They signed an indenture dated 20 October 1532 whereby the abbot granted and demised a third of Osgoodby Grange for 99 years. M. J. Hebditch (ed) (2014), *Yorkshire Deeds* vol 9, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, p. 131
- 18 M. Beresford (1984), *History on the Ground*, Gloucester, Alan Sutton Publishing Ltd, pp. 52-63. Beresford details the full lawsuit
- 19 North Yorkshire County Record Office, ZDV (MIC 3644/205)
- 20 North Yorkshire County Record Office, ZDV (MIC 3644/209)
- 21 North Yorkshire County Record Office, ZDV (MIC 3644/209). Ralph Westropp of York, Sarjeant at Arms
- 22 North Yorkshire County Record Office, ZDV (MIC 3644/207). Sir John Harte, native of Kilburn, founder of East India Company and Lord Mayor of London, d. 1604

- 23 The Bellasis family had acquired neighbouring Newburgh Priory at the suppression
- 24 North Yorkshire County Record Office, ZDV (MIC 3644/212)
- 25 North Yorkshire County Record Office, ZDV (MIC 3644/217)
- 26 North Yorkshire County Record Office, ZDV (MIC 3644/220)
- 27 Richard Staveley (b. 1523, d. 1604), Henry Bellasys (b. 1555)
- 28 North Yorkshire County Record Office, ZDV (MIC 3644/224)
- 29 Victoria Count History, 1923, *op. cit.* (accessed 12.08.19)
- 30 Exch Dep East 134, Eliz no 34. The National Archives MPB 1/32. 1 item extracted from E178/2779, a plat of the parish of Old Byland by Christopher Saxton 1598. This map shows detail to the level of single boundary stones and through prose indicates field names, present and past land use as well as an area marked 'Mr Storye' immediately south of the modern village of Old Byland
- 31 V.G. Swan and R. Wilson-North (1985), *Site of Probable Monastic Grange, Valley View Farm*, Royal Commission on the Historic Monuments of England, NHRE 924403 (Grey literature, typescript report and survey plan)
- 32 *Ibid.*
- 33 Helmsley Archaeological and Historical Society, 'Reminiscences of the early days of the Society as recalled by Raymond Hayes, MBE (1909-2000)', <http://www.helmsleyarchaeologicalandhistoricalsociety.org.uk/history.htm> (accessed 15.08.2019) and Anon (1963), 'Old Byland', *Transactions of the Scarborough and District Archaeological Society* 1.6, p. 37
- 34 J. Buglass (2018), *Valley View Farm, Old Byland, North Yorkshire, Archaeological Evaluation*, JB Archaeology Ltd (Grey literature)
- 35 M. Jecock and M. Oakley (2018), *Assessment of Earthworks at Old Byland*: c SE 5477 8586, Historic England (Grey literature)
- 36 Historic England, 'Old Byland monastic grange immediately to the west and north-west of Valley View Farm', <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1460058> (accessed 12.08.19)
- 37 Roll 32, Hen VIII Augmentation Office, abstract in W. Dugdale (1846), *Monasticon Anglicanum: A History of the Abbies and Other Monasteries, Hospitals, Frieries, and Cathedral and Collegiate Churches, with Their Dependencies, in England and Wales; Also of All Such Scotch, Irish, and French Monasteries, as Were in Any Manner Connected with Religious Houses in England*, Volume 5, pp. 354-5
- 38 It has not been possible to locate the 'plain called Flawbarghe' (or 'Flawburghe') from the tenancy agreement

Book reviews

Yorkshire: A Lyrical History of England's Greatest County

by Richard Morris

Publisher: Weidenfeld and Nicolson

ISBN: 9780297609438

Price: Hardback, £25.00; Paperback, £10.99

It is a brave author who sets out to cover the history of England's largest county in a single volume, faced with having to make sense of the myriad of people, places and events that give the region its unique identity. Some authors quite understandably adopt a broad chronological approach, like the late David Hey's 2005 classic *A History of Yorkshire: County of the Broad Acres* and the more recent *The Little History of Yorkshire* by Ingrid Barton. Other authors weave history and topography together to charming effect, such as Gordon Home's 1908 *Yorkshire* or Arthur Norway's 1899 Yorkshire volume in the *Highways and Byways* series. But this new book by Richard Morris, *Yorkshire: A Lyrical History of England's Greatest County*, defies easy characterisation. It is neither a straightforward history despite the title, nor a tour around the county's historic places as a glance at the book's four main headings – 'The Ainsty and York', 'North', 'East' and 'West' – might at first suggest. I also did not find it particularly lyrical in the dictionary sense of a work that expresses 'the writer's emotions in an imaginative and beautiful way', but it is still a fascinating read, part autobiography, part family history and part a pure celebration of Yorkshire's past and its place in the wider world.

Richard Morris is a well-known academic and author, much of whose career has been spent in Yorkshire: working on rescue excavations at York Minster, as Director of the York-based Council for British Archaeology and with periods spent in academic posts at Leeds, York and Huddersfield universities. He therefore knows the area well and, as this book makes clear, has explored aspects of the region's past in considerable detail.

Morris begins by wrestling with the question of how to begin the book when 'Yorkshire's selfhood is more like that of an empire than a county.' An old family photograph provides the starting point at Scarborough but the introductory chapter soon moves on to explain the county's geological history and structure. This may seem a fairly standard beginning for a county history – start with the geology then move on to the Stone Ages – but this is not what happens. Instead each chapter takes the reader on a journey of twists and turns that can at first seem confusing but which together form a richly layered picture of how people make the past and the past makes the people. Take, for example, the first chapter entitled 'My World Begins'. Here Morris talks first about his mother's birthplace of Carlin Howe on the coast near Skinningrove. However, rather than exploring this story, he follows that of a close neighbour, Alfred Myers, for the next few pages. We read about Myers' bad experiences when imprisoned as a conscientious objector in the First World War. Then the focus switches to potted histories of Bawtry and Doncaster as places Myers must have passed through on his rail journey home after his release in 1919. Before the chapter is finished, Morris discusses early industrial Bradford, the growth in interest in historical Yorkshire in the late nineteenth century, the influence of the Brontës, Turner's visits to Yorkshire, the archaeological discoveries at Street House Farm near Skinningrove and ends with St Hild at Whitby and the importance of the two early English kingdoms of Deira and Bernicia in the county's early history.

The other chapters maintain the same approach, moving from one story to the next through time and place but in a way that helps you see familiar subjects in a new way, and introduces you to some stories for the first time. For example, the account of how the author participated in the discovery of the Roman sewer underneath York in 1972, descending below the street to slither along a narrow passage that had lain undisturbed for 1600 years, gives the reader a real sense of the thrill of the discovery more than any academic archaeological report ever does. In the chapter 'No Place Like Home' Morris gives an interesting account of the families who emigrated to North America in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, something which is usually overlooked in general histories of the county and something I had not considered before. The detail Morris presents is fascinating and later in the chapter the story returns to Yorkshire to describe how the descendants of these same families returned as servicemen during the Second World War, the Royal Canadian Air Force occupying 11 airfields along the Vales of York and Mowbray.

The book is illustrated with a small number of monochrome photographs in the text and by 26 colour plates printed across four pages bound in the middle of the book. There is a glossary and list of abbreviations towards the end of the book followed by over 30 pages of notes which link to references in the main text and allow the reader to explore some of the topics further. The book closes with an index (though this is not the sort of work that you will necessarily want to turn to as a reference work) and the index reveals there is much about that county's history that is missing: no entries for Rievaulx, Helmsley or Ryedale, for example. Rather this is a book to be read from cover to cover. The style is engaging and never dull, though sometimes a bit too knowing – 'Yorkshire people have an eye for a peninsula' states the author. Really? I enjoyed the book and the journey the author took me on to some of the more hidden parts of Yorkshire's story. Why he wrote the book in the first place only becomes clear on the very last page. Acknowledging the help of his wife, he reveals the book is to show her that he understands why she made him move to Yorkshire 50 years ago at the time of their marriage. It is a true labour of love.

Trevor Pearson

The Percehay Family of Ryton: Forgotten Lords of a Deserted Ryedale Township

by David Brewer

Publisher: South Ainsty Archaeological Society, 2017

ISBN: 9780956716828

Price: £10.00 (paperback)

One of the saddest aspects of the huge increase in individual historical research over the past half century has been a widespread failure to record the results in an enduring and accessible manner. Despite the rather forlorn sub-title, this substantial and beautifully produced large-format book provides a thorough and illuminating study of a particular noble family, the Percehays, over more than six centuries. They would almost certainly never be studied in such depth as part of any academic research project, particularly because their base lay in what is now a deserted settlement near Malton in the ancient North Riding of Yorkshire. The publication offers a contrast with the usual stories of success, which by definition must be exceptional, while showing that the 'failure' of this family – which did not produce enough

sons at crucial times – derives largely from a perspective which obsesses over precise ownership and authority. It is more useful to think of the local and regional systems within which groups of interconnected families operated.

The full story of this particular family is given in Chapter 2, with its pedigree detailed in a brief Chapter 3. There is then a study of the development of Ryton as an agricultural community, moving from pre-history to an account of its ‘desertion’. The remainder, over a third of the book, is devoted to introductory matter and explanatory appendices, including a chapter providing a detailed listing and discussion of local place names. David Brewer goes into great detail about the available map evidence, with excellent photographic reproductions as well as analytical figures based on them. There is, however, no index.

The Percehays emerged as a significant English family in the post-Conquest land-grab era, though how cannot be determined. They initially controlled a cluster of manors, and thus played a local part in the evolution of an increasingly integrated society, which led to the Tudor settlement. This placed their status group at the heart of a consensual web of communities gathered into counties under a monarch, leaving the aristocracy shorn of the desire or ability to act as disruptively as it did in most of Europe. English kings and queens were increasingly ruling with their advice and consent, mediated through Parliament, rather than threatening military retaliation and dispossession for dissent. Monarchs therefore could usually rely on these local gentry-led communities to administer and police themselves.

The story of the Percehays, classed by Camden in 1582 as an ancient lordly family, illustrates this. Their pride in their roots is amply demonstrated by the crest reproduced on the rear cover, which is positively Candidian in the number of ‘quarterings’ crammed onto it. As we move into better documented times, the experience of the Percehays was initially of estate-building which took them to the brink of some national significance during the fourteenth century when Sir William represented his county in Parliament and served as High Sheriff of Yorkshire. The family also provided a coroner and high commissioners of array among other offices and played a part in the emergence of York as a major European trading port – a link maintained in later years.

However, the death of Sir Lyon in 1494 marked high water and, even though in 1673 the Percehays inhabited a house with 13 hearths, their place ‘at the very top of the local social hierarchy’ rested on an economic base which had weakened considerably through the sixteenth century. In the seventeenth century they were seen as local squires, albeit making marriages which showed they were still respected for what they had once been.

A series of disputes with the neighbouring estate of Rievaulx Abbey may have contributed to their eventual loss of almost everything in the narrow familial sense. Lands were steadily alienated through divided inheritance, and sales were needed to clear debts, something complicated further by the appearance of a skilful impostor. Like many of their neighbours they always remained Catholics, though they made little show of their allegiance and continued to fill traditional administrative roles. Only one family member went public, spending his last year in jail, but this does not seem to have contributed to the family’s declining status. Nor did they lose much in the Civil War years, serving as JPs both through the Commonwealth and then under Charles II. However, the Restoration period saw decline becoming unstoppable and the last Percehay of Ryton was Christopher, who died in 1755.

A particular strength of this account is the attention paid to the women of the family in both the thirteenth and seventeenth centuries, demonstrating that what we see is not loss and defeat in any absolute or catastrophic sense, but simply shifts within a web of control over resources embracing many such closely allied and interwoven lineages. Even here the research has determinedly overcome difficulties, most notably separating the lives of two medieval Joan de Vescis.

The family's story took place within a region which changed from being a turbulent area into one which steadily prospered as more orderly habits took over and a basically fertile, if waterlogged, lowland landscape was brought under the plough. Its home settlement of Ryton, where the author grew up, might have been expected to become a larger settlement, but it was never much more than a hamlet, and it has been reduced today to a few scattered farmsteads. Again, we see that apparent 'failure' does not mean general decline, simply that it was not a convenient local site for growth in a commercialising economy.

The author is unusually explicit about his wide range of sources over the long years of research. He thereby builds confidence in both his thoroughness, and his refusal to make the sort of leaps of faith which arise so frequently in genealogical studies when gaps in a distant pedigree inevitably but annoyingly emerge. In particular, his clarity in differentiating lines within the family, and in refuting the obvious similarity of the surname (which had many spellings) to that of the illustrious if serially ill-fated Percy family, also based in Yorkshire, is admirable. He also wisely notes that precisely because the preserved documents largely deal with conflict, we should listen just as much to the intervening silences which cover the overwhelming majority of the family's time as lords of the manor of Ryton when they simply gave 'service to king, country and community'.

In closing, I admire immensely this impressive fruition of such dogged research. I would thoroughly recommend that readers purchase and read a copy, and if they wish to try something like this themselves, this provides a good model to emulate.

Dr Stephen Caunce

The Cult of St Olaf in England

by John Toy

Publisher: The Trustees of the Friends of St Gregory's Minster

ISBN: 0954260597

Price: £3.00

I was first introduced to the Kirkdale Monograph Series by a friend who gave me a copy of David Goodway's *Herbert Read: Yorkshireman, Anarchist, Modernist*, published by the Friends of St Gregory's Minster in 2009. At the time I wondered how a Friends' group attached to a small, and isolated, church could produce readable scholarship of such high quality. As the years have gone by I have become acquainted with all the short books in the series, the subject matter of which is connected in some way to St Gregory's Minster, one of Ryedale's most historically important churches, rebuilt in the mid-eleventh century by the Anglo-Scandinavian Orm Gamalson. Each book is based upon a Kirkdale Lecture, sponsored yearly at the Minster by the Friends. The books, of about 35 pages each, are edited by S.A.J.

Bradley, Professor Emeritus at the University of York. A full list of the published titles in the series, and information on how to purchase a copy, appear at the bottom of this review.

The latest monograph to appear in the series is *The Cult of St Olaf in England* (2017) by the Revd Dr John Toy (previously Chancellor of York Minster).

Olaf was truly a man of his times: a Norwegian mercenary who fought for Ethelred II (the 'unready'), the Anglo-Saxon king of England, against the (Danish) Vikings in London in about 1010. I was delighted to be reminded that the nursery rhyme 'London Bridge Is Falling Down' refers to the success that Olaf and his men had in pulling down the bridge controlled by the Danish Vikings. Later, while in Rouen still in service with the Anglo-Saxon royal house, he converted to Christianity and was baptised in the cathedral there. According to his hagiographers, in 1014 he had a vision which impelled him to renounce his mercenary calling and return to Norway to become its sole Christian ruler. Under him, Norway's people were forced to convert to Christianity: he is said to have convinced his subjects with the immortal phrase, 'baptism or death'. He himself was killed in battle at Stiklestad (near Trondheim) in 1030 and was almost immediately declared a saint and martyr by Grimkell, an English bishop. His cult was promoted by Cnut (an old enemy) throughout England and Scandinavia; he was declared 'Perpetual King of Norway' and patron saint of the country. He was venerated in England until the Reformation.

Even this much-abbreviated biography tells us some intriguing information about life in both England and the Scandinavian lands in the years immediately preceding the rebuilding of St Gregory's by Orm Gamalson. Both the English and the Scandinavians were comfortable travelling back and forth across the North Sea; indeed, as the author reminds us, English missionaries were constantly travelling to Norway and elsewhere to convert the unbaptised. Boundaries between peoples, lands and cultures were permeable. Most interesting is the speed with which Olaf was declared a saint (in Norway by an English bishop). Cnut quickly appropriated, *post-mortem*, Olaf as a brilliant miracle producer and soldier-saint for propaganda purposes.¹ This reminded me of our very own Tony Blair who was so quick off the mark to claim Princess Diana as the 'People's Princess' after her death.

The author describes the churches dedicated to the saint; lists the hagiographies of his life and miracles; shows some of the images of Olaf; and discusses the liturgies, or words used in the services held in the saint's honour. Four appendices provide the Latin texts of the Mass of St Olaf in *The Red Book of Darley* (c. 1060); the Office of St Olaf in *The Leofric Collectar* (c. 1055); the Mass of St Olaf in the Bodleian Library (c. 1190); and the Legendarium of Exeter Cathedral. Four pages contain colour illustrations of images of St Olaf.

Four out of the 13 churches dedicated to St Olaf are known to have existed in the eleventh century and Toy believes that there may have been more. Another important connection between St Gregory's and the cult of St Olaf is St Olave's Church in Marygate, York. *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* tells us that St Olave's in York was built and dedicated to Olaf by Siward, Earl of Northumberland, in 1055 – just about the time that St Gregory's was being rebuilt by Orm Gamalson who was related to Siward through marriage. And although all the *Lives* of Olaf in the early medieval period were in Nordic, they quickly became known in England; in fact, one manuscript of an important *Life* of Olaf belonged to Fountains Abbey.

In his introduction to this monograph, the author tells us that there are two connections between the cult of St Olaf in England and St Gregory's: 'both witness to the beginning of a

new church-centred “life” in the first half of eleventh-century England; and both witness in their own ways to the impact and absorption of Scandinavian (ex-Viking) influence in this part of Britain.’ I wish that Dr Toy had been clearer in laying out for the lay reader what this new ‘church-centred’ life was all about; I for one regret my lack of understanding of the importance of the liturgies used in connection with the cult of St Olaf. I would also like to have learned more about the propaganda purposes to which the legend of St Olaf was put in the years after his death. Nevertheless, this monograph joins its siblings in the Kirkdale Series in making a distinguished contribution to scholarship.

Copies of the monographs may be purchased from the bookstall in St Gregory’s, Kirkdale. For mail order sales visit www.kirkdalechurches.org.uk/st-gregorys-kirkdale/.

S.A.J. Bradley (2002), *Orm Gamalson’s Sundial: The Lily’s Blossom and the Roses’ Fragrance*. ISBN: 0954260503. Price: £2.50

Richard Fletcher (2003), *St Gregory’s Minster Kirkdale*. ISBN: 0954260511. Price £2.00

Gordon Leff (2007), *Alcuin of York and the Foundations of Medieval Education*. ISBN: 095426052X. Price £2.00

Matthew Townend (2007), *Scandinavian Culture in Eleventh-Century Yorkshire*. ISBN: 0954260538. Price £2.50

David Goodway (2009), *Herbert Read: Yorkshireman, Anarchist, Modernist*. ISBN: 0954260546. Price £2.50

Thomas Pickles (2012), *From Minsters to Parish Churches: Power, Religious Patronage and Pastoral Care in Early Medieval Ryedale*. ISBN 0954260554. Price £3.50

S.A.J. Bradley (2012), *When the Danes Most Greatly Persecuted Them: Two Anglo-Saxon Voices from the Height of the Viking Atrocities of the Early 11th Century*. ISBN: 0954260570. Price £2.00

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William Sheils (2014), *A Quiet Reformation: The Church in Ryedale from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Century*. ISBN: 0954260589. Price £2.50

John Toy (2017), *The Cult of St Olaf in England*. ISBN 0954260597. Price £3.00

Note

1 See Matthew Townend’s 2007 contribution to the Kirkdale Series, *Scandinavian Culture in Eleventh-Century Yorkshire*, p. 23

Farrell Burnett

Acknowledgements

The Editor and Helmsley Archaeological and Historical Society would like to thank the following for allowing us to use the following:

Copyright Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture, photographer T. Middlemass, photos on pp. 42, top right and left

Ed Dennison, EDAS, photo on back cover; map on p. 30; drawing on p. 35; and photos on pp. 30, 32, 33, 34 and 37

Peter Morgan and John K. Harrison, the photo and overlay on pp. 10

Elizabeth Sanderson, photos on pp. 5, 6, 7 and 15

Elizabeth Sanderson and Geoff Snowdon, plans on pp. 9 and 11

English Heritage Trust, images on front cover and on pp. 45 and 46

Scarborough Archaeological and Historical Society, map on p. 29 and diagram on p. 31

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View across the former Fyling deer park from Far Park Plantation, looking north-west, November 2016
(see page 29)